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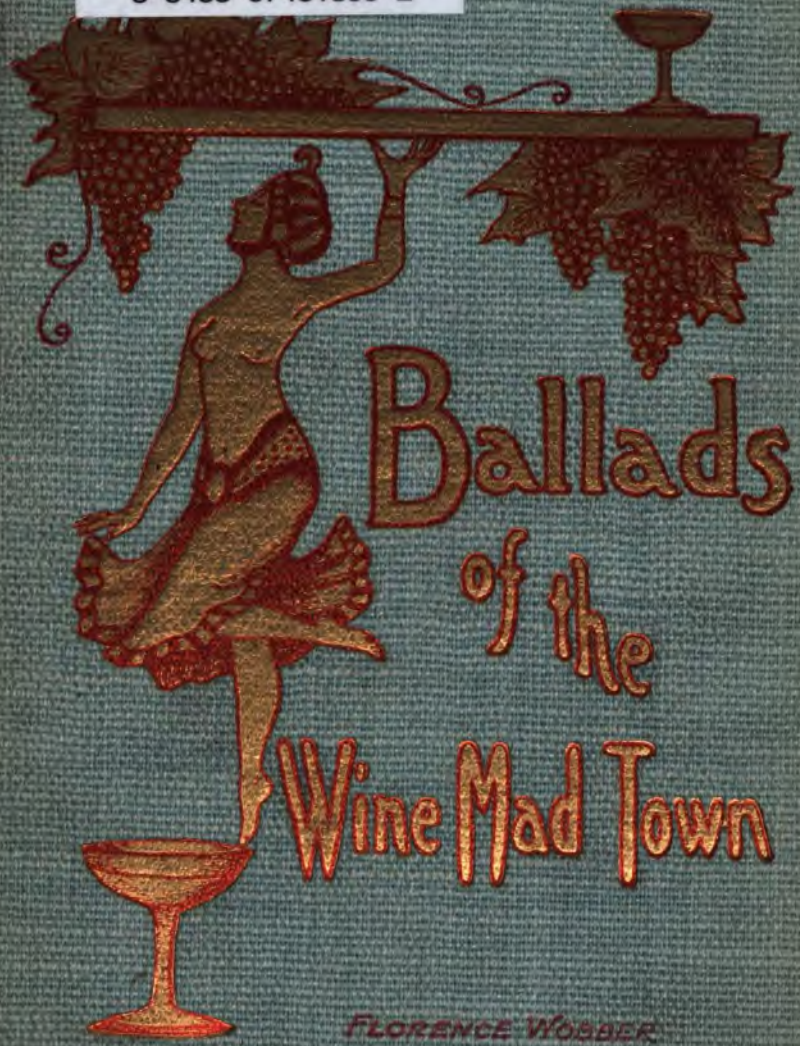
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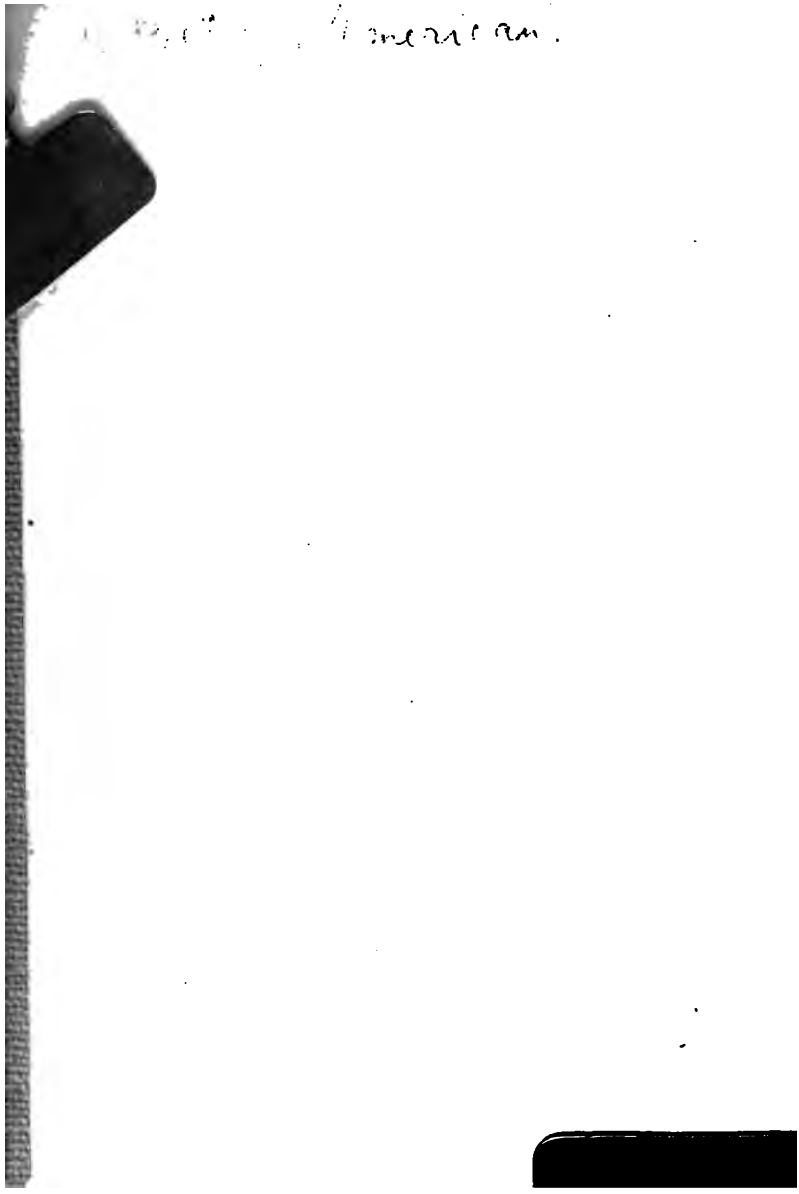
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Ballads of the Wine Mad Town

FLORENCE WOBBER



Wobber

BALLADS
of the
WINE MAD TOWN

BY FLORENCE WOBBER



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FOREWORD

THE NAMES OF CITIES AND CHARACTERS IN THESE BALLADS ARE TAKEN FROM "SILVER AND BLACK," THE STORY OF THE CYCLE OF TIME, BY THE AUTHOR, TO BE PUBLISHED AT A LATER DATE.

See astertsk *

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
TO NO ONE, FOR REASONS
OBVIOUS

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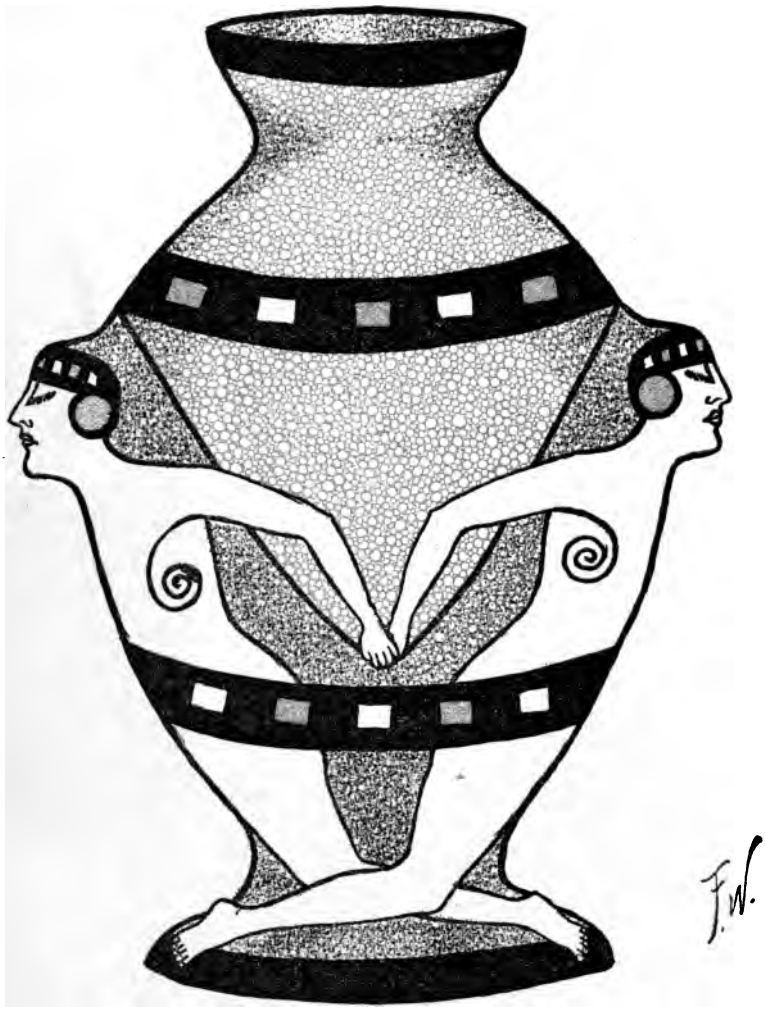
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Wine Jar of the Second Apex of Civilization

THE LEGEND OF THE WINE

From
(*Silver and Black*)
During the Second Apex of Civilization.

ON the second apex of the world's civilization, there where Priam and Kamma* lived, loved and suffered, was the drink of the false delight first discovered.

Circumstance and accident were the creators of its existence, and the discovery of its effect came about through the ignorance of a certain superstition, entertained by the people of the cities, which was not known to certain classes of desert wanderers.

The curse, as I have said, was given to those people and the future world through ignorance, and through that same medium has it been permitted to remain.

And though present civilization prides itself upon its advancement, and on its emancipation from different phases of old-time bondage, traditions, and on its super-intelligence, thinking itself a far, far cry from the old conditions existing in the ages which it has fitted with epochal names, weighed and chronicled through research and calculations—it is still in the throes of this strange and subtile reason-destroyer.

You can work the sum of it out in your own mind, and compare your knowledge of epochs,

their crimes, sins and sorrows, with your present conditions, and you will not have to vivify your imagination to be able to judge the relative values.

And another thing of moment to our present-day thinker is the fact that the curse was not many months old before the great wars were instituted and waged fiercely against its menace to a better civilization.

Even before Priam and Kamma* had drifted away to their silent tombs in the sifting sands of the old Egyptian desert, was this great war begun.

The great wars of the world, the poetic "War of the Roses," and all the conflicts chronicled in history by man, and sung in his imagination as legends, are as a breath's duration and a pale consequence against this greatest of all great wars, "The War of the Wine." And in giving you my own legend, I am merely drawing your mind to our unsupported epoch comparisons.

Man in his individual hour is perhaps greatest of all, and these hours overlap in the decades making the endless chain of mind; the last link welded is merely the resting-place of the links to come. Our age is still thinking out the old problems, whether more or less formidable I do not know; I know only that they are still with us.

And now I will give you the Legend of the Wine:

In the ancient city of Florien,* on the lower rim of the first Egyptian desert, the land that is now designated as Arabia, there lived the perfume-distillers of the century perhaps 7000 B. C.

(Though history will tell you that the world is younger than this date would indicate, it has nothing to do with my story, for history is working at the base of the first lowest level designated as x on my chart, and bringing their theory of advancement along the dotted lines x to x, not seeing the uplift of the interval that lies between.)

Florien was the garden city of its time, as each city in those days was dedicated to certain sciences and arts and kept strictly within its own sphere and worked to the common betterment of its selected art or profession.

The arts of this city have nothing to do with the wine except that they belonged to the first city upon the earth where the discovery of wine took place, and that brought intoxication into the world.

(And observe, by chart, how the line descends again from that elevation. It is truly significant.)

It was brought about in the house of Sabah Habannan, the leading perfume-distiller of the

place. Sabah was also an experimenter with and creator of different blends of odors, and his essences found their way to all the cities about the Egyptian lands.

Ten years before my story opens, Obiad, the seven-year old son of Sabah, was stolen from his home by the desert wanderers, who seldom came to the towns, and when they did it was to pilfer from the residents and steal their children. They took Obiad in the hope that his wealthy father would institute a search and bring a ransom with him. But the heart-broken father, believing through some false psychic impression that his son was dead, neither offered a ransom nor sent any one in pursuit. He was so terribly grieved that he took the torture of his bereavement for certain proof of his son's death.

And so the years wore on.

Sabah was not altogether wrong in his imagination concerning his child's doom, for within a year of his capture the little Obiad died and his youthful spirit sped back to the infinite domain of the Great Watcher.

Ten years had passed, but the father still mourned. The story of his loss and his unceasing sorrow was still told throughout the land.

At last it reached the ears of one Haissen Baah, who was just eighteen years old, and possessed of a subtile scheming brain.

Haissen reasoned that if the father still grieved for his son he would no doubt be willing and glad to believe that his son was still alive, provided that a well-constructed story were brought to him of his son's discovering the secret of his parentage, the city of his birth, the circumstances of the abduction and his desire to return to his adoring parent.

The only bar to a complete arrangement was in the lack of knowledge of private details of the son's life under the parental roof.

Haissen confided his plans to his fellow-wanderers of the desert, and the obstacle of the missing details, and together they worked up the scheme, and planned to send one of their members to the city to get these particulars. He was to enquire cautiously, so as not to excite suspicion.

It was easy enough. A stranger is always given the gossip if he only shows a mild interest, and as Sabah was prominent and wealthy, a little curiosity was not a suspicious element in a stranger's conduct.

The scouting party returned with all the particulars necessary for the masquerading of Haissen as Obiad, and a letter was quickly dispatched to Sabah, telling of his son's discovery and begging for an invitation to return to his "beloved home."

They offered as proof of their sincerity the minute details they had gathered, through the gossip, of Obiad's early life, his disposition and characteristics.

It was a clever and convincing tale.

It is not necessary to explain that Sabah was wild with delight and would not listen to any counsel from his friends. Wasn't his son alive and returning to him? Couldn't he tell when he looked into his eyes that it was his own child, living and longing to be with him again?

Now I must tell you that in those days the people drank a sweet brew made of berries and fruits. They made it fresh for every meal, and did not allow it to stand or become stale, as it was well known that carelessness of that sort was punished by the infusion of evil spirits into the brew; they bubbled and snapped and showed signs of wicked life, which brought terror to the hearts of the household where the deed was committed.

If a brew had been overlooked and did ferment, as soon as it was discovered it was promptly buried in a jar, deep in the sand, and there were many rites at such burials. They had a regular graveyard for these jugs of evil spirits just outside of the city limits.

The desert wanderers knew nothing of this fermenting of the brew, as they never stopped

long enough in any place to allow it to ferment, and in most cases had none left over to go the evil way.

It was the ignorance of Haissen and his escort to his new home that changed the tide of the superstition.

Sabah sent word to his son to hasten to him, and believing him to be many miles away in the desert, did not expect him for several days. He calculated a two-day trip for his message, a day's delay in starting, and two days for the home journey, making in all five days.

This would give Sabah time to go to Ampheon,* the city of the weavers, and purchase rugs and robes with which to glorify his house for his son's home-coming.

He would also go to Palataire,* the city of poetry and music, and bring with him songs and singers for this most festive occasion.

In his great haste at departing, Sabah left a great pot of delicious brew unnoticed.

His trip would require four days and he would have the fifth day to open his house and hire servants for the reception. He kept one old servant, to whom he granted the privilege of a vacation during these four days.

So there was no one to empty the brew or bury it when it had begun to ferment. It was a little mistake, but see what it created!

Haissen was very anxious to be on his way; so he started to meet his messengers returning with the invitation. So it transpired that on the third day of Sabah's absence, Haissen and his party, numbering five, all young rascals like himself, found themselves knocking at the closed door of Sabah's domain.

They were not long in ascertaining the cause of their silent reception; and as it was understood by everybody that they were coming, they had no difficulty in gaining admittance. A friend of Sabah's was dispatched for the servant, who had the keys, and Haissen entered and took possession.

The tradespeople hastened to do his bidding, and the best supplies to be had in the town were hurried to his door.

Haissen was already receiving congratulations from many new friends. He was jolly and handsome, and the town fell for him instantly.

And then—O ye Fates of the eternal curse! Sabah's private pot of overlooked brew was discovered. Bubbling to the brim with animation and evil spirits, there was enough intoxication in it to paralyze the whole party. And before the horrified servant had become aware of what had taken place, or the friends could explain, the five had drunk it all.

There was terrible consternation. Just when the horror-stricken populace expected to witness a dreadful death scene, the five began to wax merry, to laugh, sing, joke and dance. Their merriment soon inspired the people to take part in the revel and forget the superstition.

They were having a very jolly party.

Then some one wanted more drink, but it would take at least two days to ferment a brew. There was a general cry of dismay until some one bethought himself of the spirit graveyard in the sand-plains back of the city.

He made his idea known to Haissen, who promptly sent for diggers and caused the whole graveyard to be exhumed. This very old cemetery of carefully sealed stone jugs produced the first real harvest of glorious jags in the world.

And never in the history of epochs that have followed, has there been such an orgy. Florien became the original Wine Mad Town.

And it was into this seething mass of hilarious humanity that poor Sabah returned. His house had become the first drink palace in the world. His backyard had become the first bier for "dead soldiers" in the form of empty, discarded stone urns.

The people looked upon it as the descending of happiness unto them, a release from the old bondage of a terrifying superstition. They

raised Haissen to the most exalted position in their imagination. He came only one step from mounting, in their opinion, to the glorified throne of the Great Watcher.

Haissen had forgotten his original intention, his reason for being there. Those few hours of besotted glory had obliterated every sense of reason and caution. There was no longer need for either of these senses, for he was enthusiastically supported by most of the townspeople.

Those who were not absolutely in favor of his conduct, saw in it the breeder of other possibilities, such as the spending of the almost miserly Sabah's wealth, the demoralizing of the people, and as an ultimate consequence their gain by remaining silent, and being ready to act at the opportune moment.

And poor Sabah—when he tried to question Haissen, timidly and sorrowfully, he was laughed at, called an old funeral-faced fool, and advised to go and tank up.

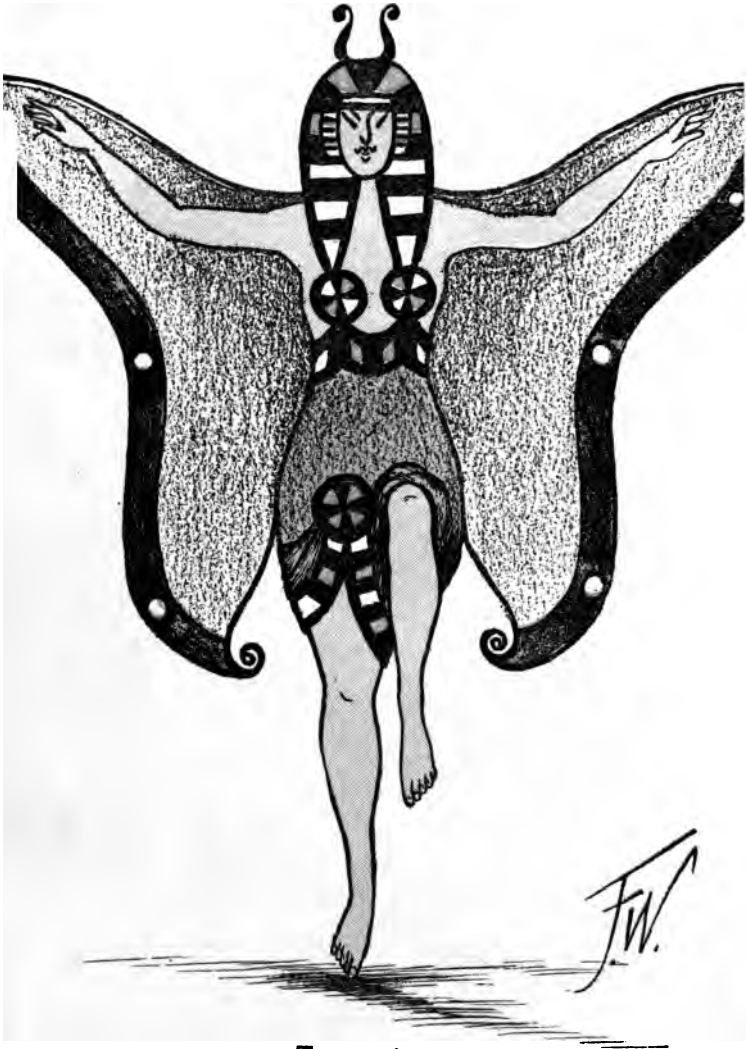
But in his sane and sorrowful mind, Sabah saw only the curse of evil fastening upon his beloved people and the world. He saw the utter hopelessness of trying to reason with the drunken brain, of appealing to the wine-besotted son of his long-suffering heart. When he saw them transform the treasure of his aesthetic soul, his

perfume-distillery, into a brewery for the making of wine, it was the last blow to his stricken heart.

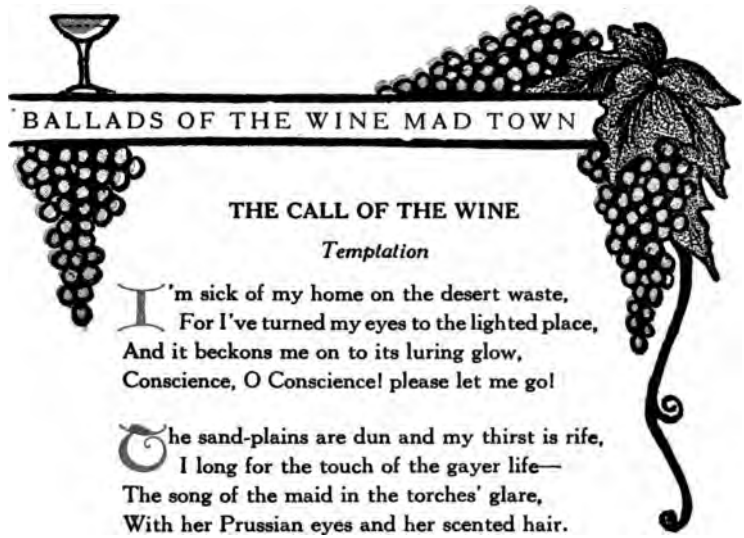
He wandered out into the bleak night of the desert, alone, far beyond the frenzied noises of the curse-ridden town, the lurid lights, and the God-forsaken people. When he could travel no longer he lay down upon the sand of the lonely desert and died, faithful to the last to his ideals and his long-mourned son, the little Obiad who was carried away into that same desert ten years before.

So he was dead, and as the slow, curious, yet sorrowful moon rose and silvered the black of the night on the old Egyptian desert, a gaunt cowering jackal crept up and sniffed his body, but did not rend it. No, he would wait for those sin-soaked bodies that would soon come down to him out of the charnel pot of the Wine Mad Town.

And You, who drink wine today, mindful of the curse, utter your inane toast to the wine-besotted and deceiving Haissen who handed the curse down to you.



Temptation



THE CALL OF THE WINE

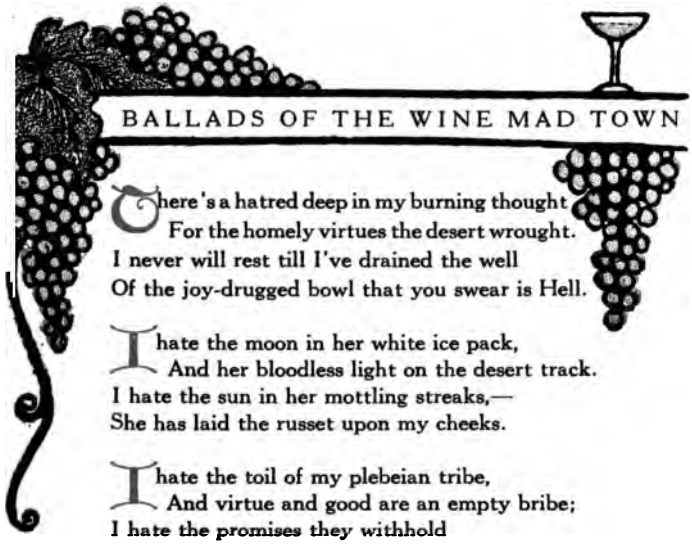
Temptation

I'm sick of my home on the desert waste,
For I've turned my eyes to the lighted place,
And it beckons me on to its luring glow,
Conscience, O Conscience! please let me go!

The sand-plains are dun and my thirst is rife,
I long for the touch of the gayer life—
The song of the maid in the torches' glare,
With her Prussian eyes and her scented hair.

The desert's lone silence a cheerless pall
Now seems, since I've heard it, the wining call,
There is no more peace in my yearning soul;
The revel and dance are my cherished goal.

And the little maid 'neath the desert moon—
Her song is as stale as a withered bloom;
For I've heard the lilt of the siren's trill,
And my heart is bound to its wish and will.



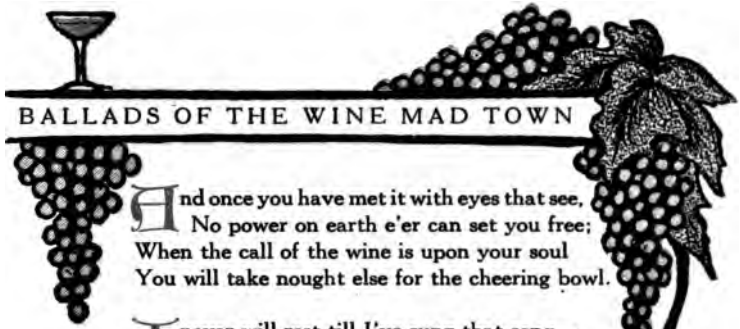
BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

There's a hatred deep in my burning thought
For the homely virtues the desert wrought.
I never will rest till I've drained the well
Of the joy-drugged bowl that you swear is Hell.

I hate the moon in her white ice pack,
And her bloodless light on the desert track.
I hate the sun in her mottling streaks,—
She has laid the russet upon my cheeks.

I hate the toil of my plebeian tribe,
And virtue and good are an empty bribe;
I hate the promises they withhold
Until you are laid 'neath the sodden mould.

The pathway of virtue 's a barren trail,
Where burdens are hard and the joys are frail;
Where that which you crave is a cardinal sin,
Where you lose for life if for death you win.



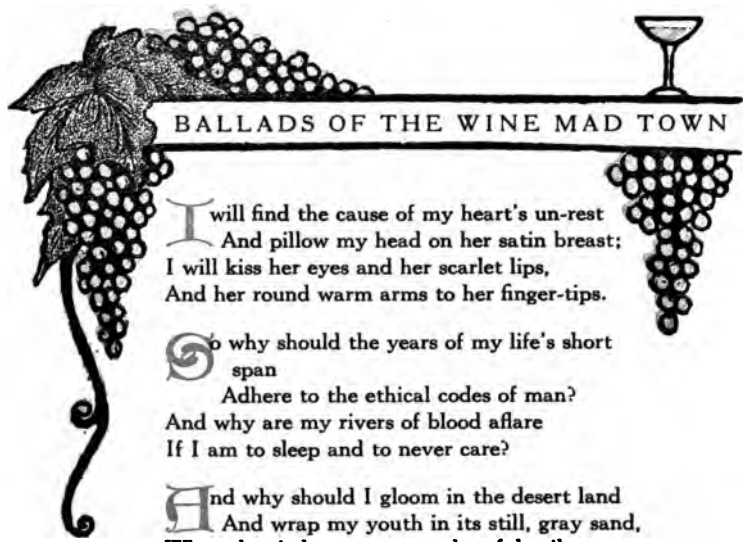
BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

And once you have met it with eyes that see,
No power on earth e'er can set you free;
When the call of the wine is upon your soul
You will take nought else for the cheering bowl.

I never will rest till I've sung that song—
Till I've danced and feasted the whole night long,
And have found the charm in the lighted lanes
That will kindle great fires within my veins.

I will hear the wit and the clever speech,
I will garner all secrets within my reach;
I will drink the wines of the distant lands,
They will purge my brain of the desert sands.

I will buy a robe of a royal hue,
And sandals all studded with pearls, like dew.
A chaplet of iris will be my crown;
Bedight to dance in the Wine Mad Town.



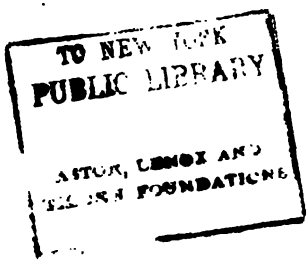
BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

I will find the cause of my heart's un-rest
And pillow my head on her satin breast;
I will kiss her eyes and her scarlet lips,
And her round warm arms to her finger-tips.

So why should the years of my life's short span
Adhere to the ethical codes of man?
And why are my rivers of blood aflare
If I am to sleep and to never care?

And why should I gloom in the desert land
And wrap my youth in its still, gray sand,
When the tie but seems as a hateful coil
Of that monster virtue that strives to foil?

My nature is yearning to spurn the wall
Of my conscience, striving to heed the call,
And wallow my soul in its wine mad glow.
Farewell to the desert! for I shall go!


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Kamma

THE RAINBOW POOLS

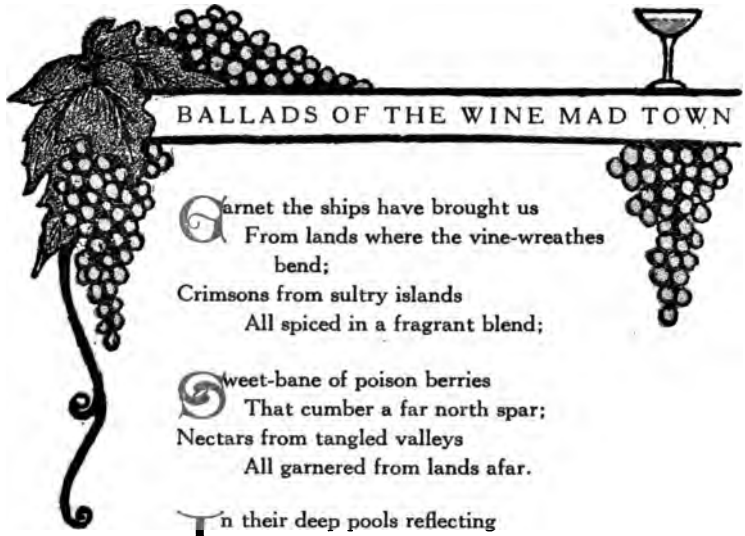
Wine

Emerald and amber vases,
Fair Prussian and ruby urns,
Deep as your eyes, sweet Lady,
Where the rainbow fire burns.

Stars from the endless heavens
Encircle their crystal rims,
Bright as your eyes, fair Lady,
And sweet as your luring sins.

Coral and gold in pastel,
Soft toning of sunset glow
Tinting the distant mountain
Along its white crest of snow.

Foam of rare pearls, my Lady,
To sparkle your lovely lips;
Bubbles for jewels studding
The bands to your finger-tips.



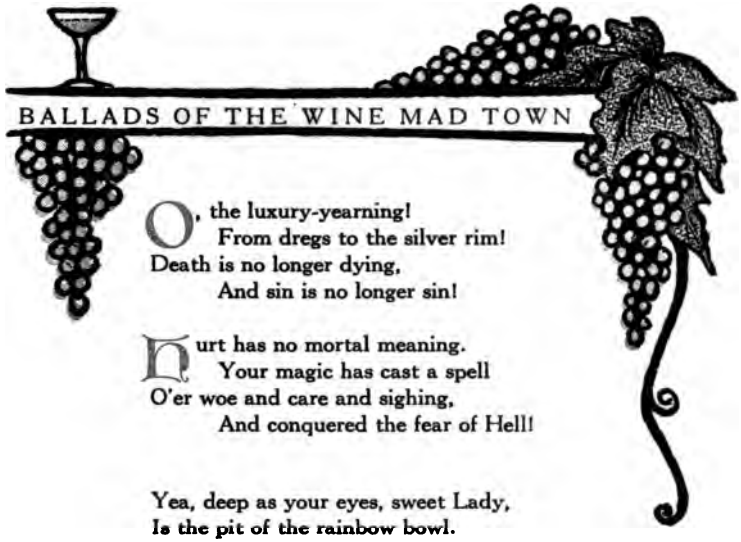
BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

Garnet the ships have brought us
From lands where the vine-wreathes bend;
Crimsons from sultry islands
All spiced in a fragrant blend;

Sweet-bane of poison berries
That cumber a far north spar;
Nectars from tangled valleys
All garnered from lands afar.

In their deep pools reflecting
The blood of each foreign race,
All of their arts are mounting
Their lure on your brooding face.

Songs from their hearts compelling
The throb in your bosom white,—
Its sweet, soft satin pillow
Will cradle my head tonight.



BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

O, the luxury-yearning!
From dregs to the silver rim!
Death is no longer dying,
And sin is no longer sin!

Hurt has no mortal meaning.
Your magic has cast a spell
O'er woe and care and sighing,
And conquered the fear of Hell!

Yea, deep as your eyes, sweet Lady,
Is the pit of the rainbow bowl.
And true as your faith, lip-promised,
Is the heart of the shining goal;
As true as the sparkling bubble
As it springs from the rainbow pool;
And yet, in the real, sweet Lady,
The dream of a drunken fool!

REVEL

Priam's Farewell to the Desert

Night of the desert you drove me to sleep
For years when your dark came down;
I hurry away as your drab wings sweep
Their shade o'er the sands in a twilight frown.
For I have a dream that can not fulfill
In the desert's waste where the night is chill.

Now I have fled from your sheltering care,
From under the thrall of your silent fold:
And little I'll reck that you still wait there
Reproving the lights as you ever hold
Unfaltering vigil so grim yet kind;
Bestowing sweet rest on the unsoiled mind.

You shelter the timorous, tender things
In your caverns deep, where they haste to rest;
Harbored and hovered by shadowy wings
That shackle the doors of the dimming west
When the day is done and her banners furled
Under the rim of the great still world.

Priam, the restless youth of the desert, deserting his simple life and the love of the little Moon Maiden, has fled to the wine-mad City of Aspiux to seek "The cause of his soul's unrest."

The revelers welcome him and christen him Youth.

Here he meets Sin in the guise of a beautiful woman. She is all his imagination has pictured. He believes her to be True Love and pays ardent court to her charm and beauty.

His devotion is ideal until it is inflamed to passion by the drinking of wine.

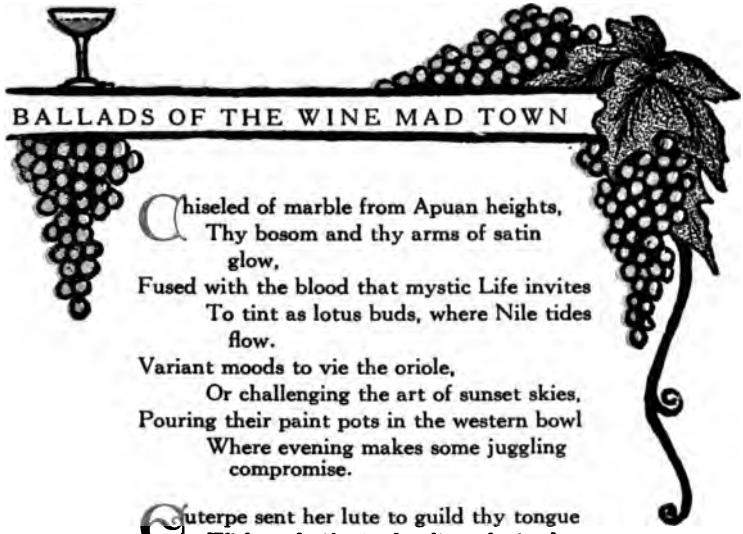
ENCHANTMENT

The Song of Youth and Infatuation

I find thee in the halls of Pyrocine,*
Here where the earth gods build their paradise;
Fairer than when thou wert my golden dream
Gazing upon me with thine haunting eyes.
Rivers of radiant light are flowing,
Flooding before my vision's rosy sight—
Banks of purple iris brightly blowing—
Into the land beyond nocturnal blight.

Ask me why they brought the earth to being,
With song and light and gladness to endow;
Answering the why of Fate's decreeing
Each fibre of my being whispers: Thou.
Fair and fragrant as the nooning flowers,
Reflecting all the glory of the sun—
All the radiant hues of rainbow hours—
All the glorious warmth of halcyon
Love winds from the hidden worlds afar,
Where sings the nightingale perpetually;
In that fair realm beyond the last white star;
Where Love is bound unto Eternity.

Thy tresses are as midnight's streamers, deep,
That space the stars above the cosmic globe
Where highlights play against the Prussian sweep
Of Heaven's ever changing, glittering robe.
Highlights like silver ribbon wrought as bars
To bind the yearning Heavens there in space;
A latticework to keep the tender stars
From rushing earth-ward to behold thy face.

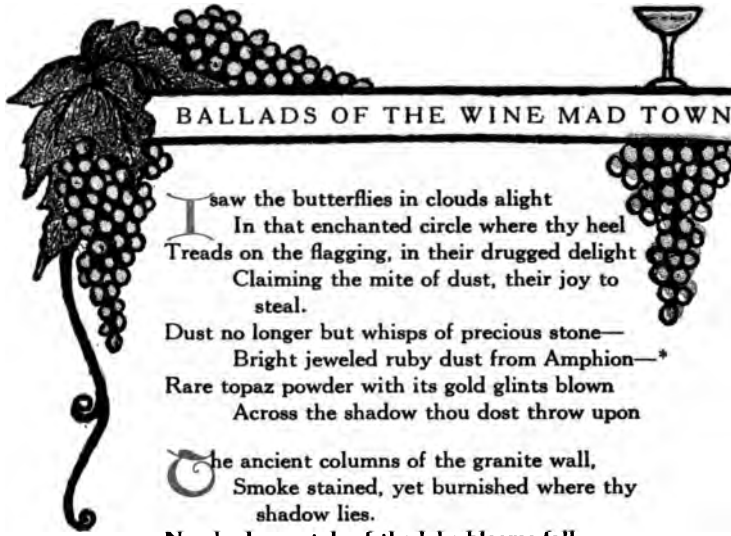


BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

Chiseled of marble from Apuan heights,
Thy bosom and thy arms of satin glow,
Fused with the blood that mystic Life invites
To tint as lotus buds, where Nile tides flow.
Variant moods to vie the oriole,
Or challenging the art of sunset skies,
Pouring their paint pots in the western bowl
Where evening makes some juggling compromise.

Euterpe sent her lute to guild thy tongue
With oral gifts in dazzling plenitude;
Above thy brow my loadstar's light is swung,
A stellar signet for each sweet prelude.
Harps of the Temple still their vibrant strings,
Suspended in charmed silence, mute delight;
Even the dulcet wind no longer sings,
Stilled in the worship that thy lips invite.

Granted pardons from the aerial plain
From whence they sent thee to the halls of Rhei;*
Pardon from time and care and blighting pain—
Pardon from death and sin's iniquity.
To view the matchless splendor of thy form
These pardons make for Sin a sacred shrine;
No charge against thy deeds shall e'er be sworn,
By loving thou hast made all things divine.



BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

I saw the butterflies in clouds alight
In that enchanted circle where thy heel
Treads on the flagging, in their drugged delight
Claiming the mite of dust, their joy to steal.
Dust no longer but whisps of precious stone—
Bright jeweled ruby dust from Amphion—*
Rare topaz powder with its gold glints blown
Across the shadow thou dost throw upon

The ancient columns of the granite wall,
Smoke stained, yet burnished where thy shadow lies.
Numberless petals of the lake blooms fall
From their glad hearts, to greet thy lovely eyes
Where lies mystery, ever slumbering,
Like vague designs behind some secret door.
Oracles pause in fear of plundering;
Safe as the hidden, silken books of Korr.*

I saw Nile swallows with their pinions spread,
With wing to wing as wreaths of throbbing song,
In circles poised above thy wondrous head;
Nought but thy charm to hold them as a thong.
I saw camellias, with seashell lips,
Steal from the moonlit garden's scented keep,
Only to kiss thy pulsing finger-tips;
Then melt away in joyous swooning sleep.

Youth pauses in his singing, the Imp of Mischief perceiving his hesitant mood sings to Sin a warning of her duty to blind his eyes with desire.

Song of the Imp of Mischief

'er he can moralize,
Quick, thou shalt dust his eyes;
More blinding power of charm to seduce
Loosen thy girdle, rare,
Leaving thy bosom bare;
Beautiful dust ensnare, play fast and loose.

oft tinted petal skin
Wrapping thy spirit in;
Eyes from the diadem Heaven hath pledged.
Smother his innocence,
Ruthless of consequence;
Dogs! but they made him dense, high time he fledged.

oft crushing arms enthrall,
E'en though those pillars fall;
E'en though those lights in the niches go stark.
E'en though the jackals send
Cries for his flesh, to rend;
They want their dividend, out in the dark.

hake thy bright tresses loose,
Laden with scents profuse;
So like a snare for his soul's wilted bloom.
Give him thy lips to press
Held in a long caress—
Steeped in the wine duress, sealing his doom.

As the song of the Imp ceases, Youth becomes conscious of a new sensation stealing over his form. He becomes acutely aware of his mortal body. He resumes his song.

The Tides of Passion

Thus far I have been sated by thy sight,
No passion stirs my blood as I behold;
Yet stirring deep within, some ponderous might
Tells me my joys are yet as half untold.
O'er thy form leap carnal thoughts, caressing;
Now even of thy flesh am I aware.
Slowly Truth to Love must bow, confessing—
The torches flame, the wine is red and rare.

Glaring torch, my brow now vies thy flaming;
Redder the wine, and nearer art thy charms.
Thou art brighter than their poor art, shaming
Their passion as I hold thee in my arms!
Give me thy breath to drink, the wine is staling,
I thirst though goblet, cup and urn are brimmed.
Sing thy song, the flute notes are thin wailing;
The torch is pale, all else on earth is dimmed.

Give thine eyes forever to my seeing,
Over the clouds of shining rhapsody;
Give thy panting, pulsing, precious being—
For thy arm clasp I'll give Eternity!
Priceless vase of mysteries, manifold,
Until this hour sensed as moulded clay.
Grudge I the years when prudishness did hold
My heritage beneath its churlish sway.

Perfect vase, yet only half revealing
The depth of joy the wakened senses claim.
Virtue, blind and cold and starved, unfeeling,
Thy years on earth are piteous and vain.
Sated vase, sink softly to thy swooning
In those dear arms, sweet scented prison bars.
All the wasted years, this night consuming;
Drifting away beyond the burning stars.

Youth falls asleep in the arms of Sin. While he is sleeping (a sated drunken stupor) the little Moon Maiden comes wandering down through the Halls of Fire seeking her lost love, Priam, who deserted her, in the desert, when he saw the lights of the Wine Mad Town.

The Imp of Mischief seeing her, and fearing that she will awaken Youth and spirit him away, covers his face with the mask of drunkenness. The little Moon Maiden, knowing him not in his disguise, passes on out into the yawning desert night.

The song of the Moon Maiden as she passes through the Temple of Wine, seeking her loved one.

He Has Long Been Gone!

Mother of Egypt, give him back to me!
Out of the magic of the lure and light—
Out of the vast throng of humanity
Like great rivers surging beyond my sight.
Grief of my heart, he has long been gone;
Still drift the sands o'er the desert's sweep,
Still comes the night and the golden dawn—
Heedless of me as I vigil keep.

Seek I his face in the vast, gay throng
Under the lights of the temple, bright;
Seek I his voice in the sweet love song
Sang to my soul in the desert night.
Tell me, O singer, of the joyous band:
Tell me, O dancer, of the fleetest feet:
In thy wide wandering about the land
Met thou a singer with a voice as sweet—

As the mockingbird's in the evening glow—
As the reed flute's note, or the crevice dove?
Had he passed these halls, Oh you'd surely know
And recall the song of my desert Love.
No word, to my query, dost answer me,
O, jeweled dancer, in thy robe of light.
That he walked through these halls it cannot be;
I'll seek him again in the desert night.

I'll seek him again in the desert, far,
Where the Kamsin winds wail in sympathy;
I'll seek till I come to the last earth's bar—
Then seek him again in Eternity.
That great, wide Heaven where the star-watch keeps
An endless vigil from the dusk till dawn.
Will I find him there where the white moon sweeps
Mother of Egypt?—He has long been gone!

Realization

A period of time has elapsed and Youth is awakened by a shaft of morning sunlight that has found its way through a chiseled orifice which serves as a window in the Temple of Wine.

He awakens disillusioned and sober, but becomes frantic when he realizes what has transpired.

The revelers are still clowning and pay no attention to him.

He beholds Sin sleeping heavily, her purple lips parted showing her stained and uneven teeth; her hair is in wild disorder, parting into lank, snake-like strands. The raven sheen of the night before, he perceives to be the result of henna and indigo treatment, covered with perfumed oils, now lusterless and stale.

Her shoulders and arms show blue and mottled beneath the crackled coating of cheap powder, yellowing from contact with her unhealthy skin. Her jewels are of crude glass, lusterless in the truth of morning light. Her silken robes and gauze veilings are brazen imitations with broken threads and many stains.

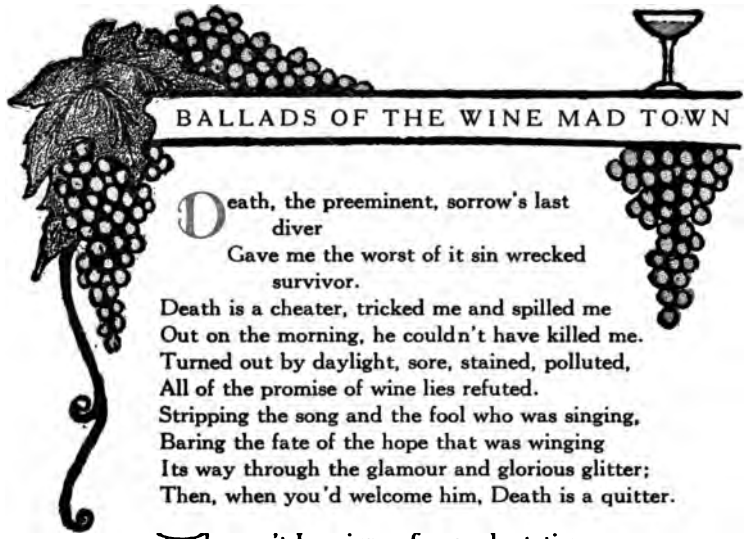
Sickened and disgusted, Youth launches into a wild tirade of hatred against the revelers, cursing and reviling them.

Youth, calling to one of the slave attendants, demands the return of the charm which he designates as his Vase.

Despair

Bring me the Vase which I held in my
arms last night,
Bring back my chalice, and lock up
this ghost of blight.
Who stole my treasure, my fair dream,
unalloyed,
And put in its place this urn, all blankness and void?
Come here, you cheating curl put back a heart in it;
Fate put a trick in it, Love had no part in it.
Emptied my precious urn while I was still sleeping,
Juggled my goods about . . . Black Hounds of Hell creeping
Into my breast while the venom was drugging me;
Less had your black crime been, knifing and slugging me.
Out of the night comes their cackle of laughter,
From out of that smoke dimmed and sinister rafter.
Within this vile temple of drink, song and prattle
Night made a prince of me, the morning a chattel.

No, plagues come and scourge them, ten thousand times over,
And lay them on thick o'er each goblet and cover.
Curses in calenture sing down those pillars;
Breed curses fast for those low bane distillers.
Drink addled maniacs! see how they're clowning,
Leering mad puppets, brain stark with drowning.
Plays with no audience, what a calamity!
Pawns of lust feigning, disgraced humanity.
I, who am one of them, give no apology—
I, who have sung with them inane phraseology.
Bring a vocabulary, fit to describe them,
Of stinging, vile curses to paint and deride them.
Description is beggared, incompetent, narrow.
Curse, them! I curse them with hate to my marrow!



BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

Death, the preeminent, sorrow's last
diver
Gave me the worst of it sin wrecked
survivor.
Death is a cheater, tricked me and spilled me
Out on the morning, he couldn't have killed me.
Turned out by daylight, sore, stained, polluted,
All of the promise of wine lies refuted.
Stripping the song and the fool who was singing,
Baring the fate of the hope that was winging
Its way through the glamour and glorious glitter;
Then, when you'd welcome him, Death is a quitter.

Why can't I conjure a fierce exhortation,
Sweep this red curse from the face of creation?
Send out your runners, your fleet desert fliers
To seek for new curses, snatched from the fires
Of peaceful, harmonious Hells of hereafters,
Compared to this Devil's house under these rafters.
Dogs, what a thirst they've got! still at their clowning;
Sizzled their tongues to crust, blistered and browning.
Mountains of glaciers, of ice-floes and spires
Are snowflakes in Hell when they battle these fires.

Courtezan dancer, thy robe is a rag-tag;
Hag, what a face thou hast! see how thy cheeks sag,
Crusted and yellowing, crackling like plaster.
Fie, what a farce thou art! crowning disaster.
Polished thy shoulders like pates of the monk herd,
Fondled to smoothness by hands of the drunkard.
Thy bosom a spectre, all shrunken with passion,
Forgotten its purpose as Nature did fashion.
Deadened to care, thou art past resurrection,
No more design than the wine cup's direction.

Just for such pleasure the wine cup
endowed her.
Bring me more curses, and fiercer and
louder—
Louder I say! they are deaf as the vagrant
Blind, dirty beggar, with conscience as fragrant
As those reeking sand plots under the laurel boughs,
Coverless sepulchres, open roof charnel house;
High-scented banquets for puttock and jackal,
Ripe, fetid, seething pit where the rooks cackle.
Scurrilous vipers not honored with dying,
But dead are their souls, in their dust putrefying.

The desert runner is brought as requested by Youth who directs him to go abroad in the land and seek for curses to fittingly describe his feeling of revulsion at all he has seen and heard in his wild night of dissipation.

But the desert runner tells him it will be a useless task as there is nothing in the desert or in the haunts of Nature to compare with the evil debauchery designed and executed by man, nothing so low and degrading as his acts when incited by the terrible potency of the curse of wine.

Even in the stretches of the wild morass where the hyenas fight and tear each other, there is a reason. It is a clean fight and for a purpose.

Even on the rocky plateau where the venomous cobra hides, with his ever ready sting, his is the viciousness of defense, the poison for his enemy.

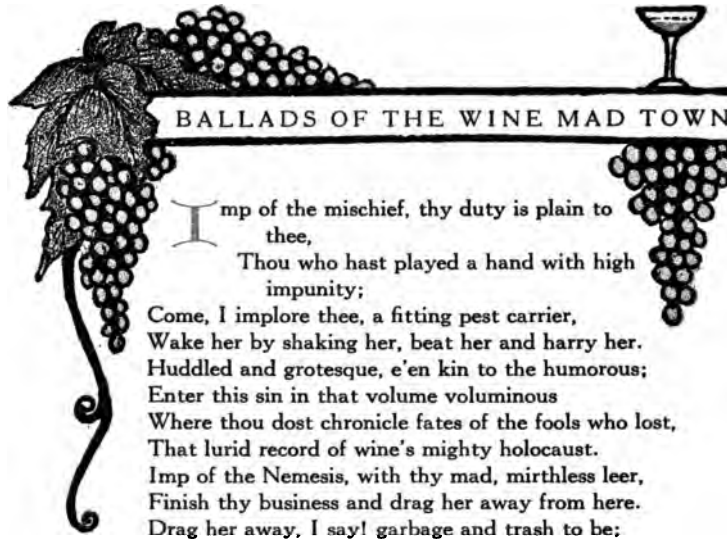
Even on the great, towering rocks of the jagged mountain range where the great saber-tooth Bengal stalks, his cruelty is impelled by the necessity of food and personal safety.

There is no disease in the land so polluting as the wine-mad depravity; even the scarlet plague kills its victim or he recovers.

Nothing in Nature that might be deemed a curse fastens its fangs so relentlessly upon its victim. These other calamities are incidents, not parasites of unconquerable habit.

As the desert runner ceases speaking Youth once more becomes aware of the sodden, sleeping creature at his side.

He calls to the Imp to take her away.



BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

Imp of the mischief, thy duty is plain to thee,
Thou who hast played a hand with high impunity;
Come, I implore thee, a fitting pest carrier,
Wake her by shaking her, beat her and harry her.
Huddled and grotesque, e'en kin to the humorous;
Enter this sin in that volume voluminous
Where thou dost chronicle fates of the fools who lost,
That lurid record of wine's mighty holocaust.
Imp of the Nemesis, with thy mad, mirthless leer,
Finish thy business and drag her away from here.
Drag her away, I say! garbage and trash to be;
She never heard my song, she who has cheated me!

Imp:

Take her, and choke her thyself, and good luck to thee;
Make it an antidote, seeing she's stuck to thee.
That ought to compensate some in the measure,
Seeing thy temper 'twould strike thee as pleasure;
Wake her and choke her, no conscience can dun thee,
Till she is as stark as a spice-scented mummy.

Youth:

Die, 'tis too late for that, dead she is, dead as tow,
Ages too late for that, dead she was long ago!
She was the bride of that lurid night dangler—
Wild midnight bride of that mad Demon Strangler.
She'll reincarnate when torches give out their flame,
She'll masquerade again, over and over again.
Youth will come worshiping, wooing his metaphor,
In through the glowing arch, out through the grim back door
Blindly adoring and drugged with great beauty—
Experience takes his hand, Thirst does her duty.
Crude Disillusionment hands him his high degree—
Poor human puppet in life's mighty tragedy.

AFTERMATH

The Eternal Cycle

The night spent by Youth in dissipation is in reality the whole gamut of debauchery and sin; so when he flees in horror from the Halls of Fire, many months have elapsed.

We find him now, in the desert, searching for the little Moon Maiden, his first and only Love.

Far out in the desert he meets a woman whom he at first sight believes to be one of the cult of mad "desert mourners,"* but when she asks him if he has seen her beloved, though unfaithful, Priam, in his world wanderings, he recognizes the little Moon Maiden. She is blind from her long vigil of gazing through the dark of the desert night, waiting for his return; she is insane and does not comprehend his words; her mind is sensitive to one thought only, and that is the terrible grief and longing of an undying love for an earthly ideal.

As Priam realizes the enormity of the consequences he flees away into the wild uninhabited part of the desert. And now he lies dying upon the sands. In these last earthly moments he has a vision.

A woman is coming toward him, he believes her to be his mother, his first earth love, but as she draws nearer she assumes the form of the little Moon Maiden, his desert sweetheart. And yet again she is transformed into the beautiful creature of his first mortal passion, the companion of his wild night of revel under the torches' glare. And now, as she stands before him, he recognizes her as Death, and a great happiness surges through his dying form. His spirit flames out in a last welcoming song.

Kiss Me, Sweet Death

Kiss me, Sweet Death, and trundle me
away
Under the sunset glow out in the west.

And thou dost come to me when all is done,
When earth joys pall and sorrow breaks the heart.
Woman, thou art, my dimming eyes perceive—
Woman who shuts the earth's cold shadows out.
Fitting it be, the cradle of my morn,
Fitting it be, my youthful desert love;
Thine wert the thralling arms of passion's strife.
Fitting it be, my shroud to bring at last;
Thrice fitting, thou dost part the strand of life.

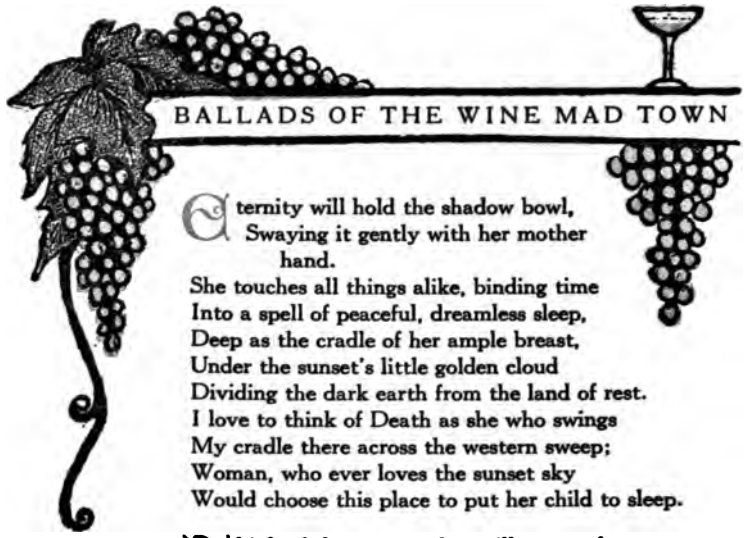
In thy white robe of sweet maternity
Gathered my soul from mystery's deepest vale.
In thy young form of fairest purity
Drew me, a lover, to thy heart of gold.
In thy mad flaming robe of wantonness
Held me a slave beneath the torches' play.
Thou art the cycle of man's destiny
Who cometh now to bear my soul away.

Sweet narcotic to flesh in earthly pain.
And thou art Death, calm, robed in sombre garb,
Coming adown the Corridors of Night—
Barren of breath and speechless, yet endowed
With a supreme power of potency
Beyond comparison with other things—
Power so great that marvels pale away—
Great hopes and prayer are crumbled witherings.

I called them He, as through my life they
stalked,
Foreboding shapes that ever masked as
Thou.
Many a time I saw him, seeming near,
Yet he was fear, to whom I gave thy place.
Death as a monster, was the slinking thing
Feigning the form of male, the heart of hate;
Cheating masquerader with harrowing tricks,
Assuming the role of an obscure fate.

Thou cometh thus, as no foreword of doom
Into the cycle of the last assize—
Into the crater of the burned-out flesh
Whose cold, dead ashes soon will be wind blown
Over the gray, bleak sands beneath the stars.
Woman thou art and kind and mothering,
Swinging the cradle of my endless night
Out beyond the rim of sunset glow,
There in the west where earth is broken off
Into the sleep pit, yawning deep below.

There, where the sun, whose day's allotted task
Follows a true track o'er the patient earth,
Smothers his torch against the strip of sky
Warmed into passion by his vivid touch;
There will she hang my floating cradle, low
Across the circle of the rosy west—
There, where the winds of night will softly blow.



BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

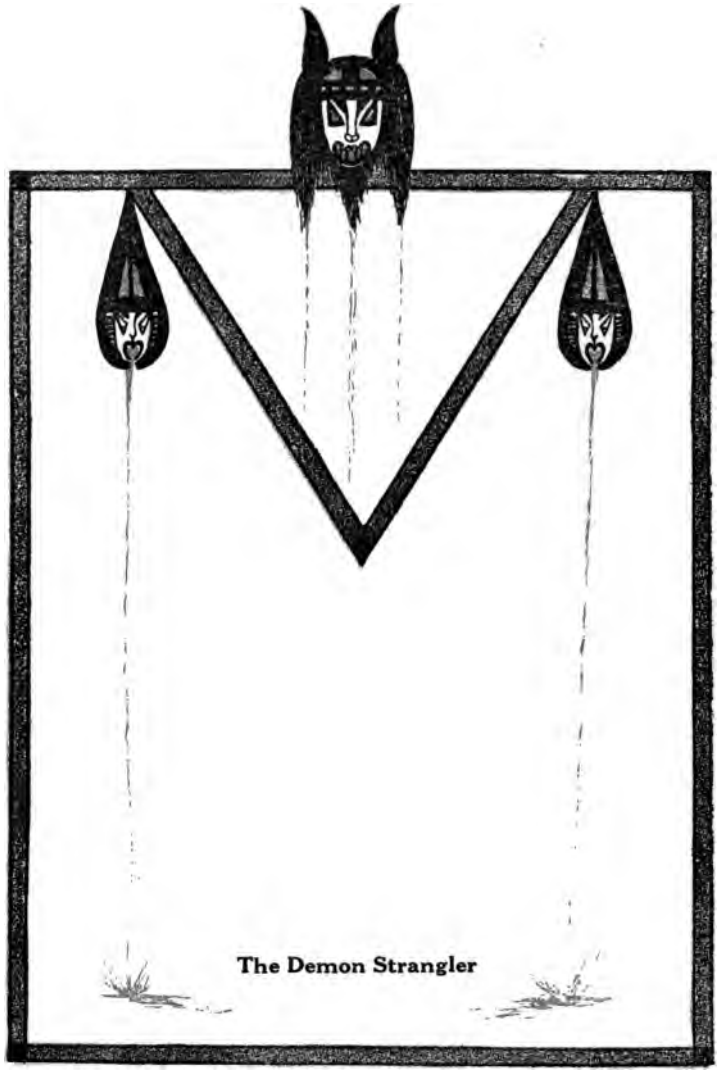
Eternity will hold the shadow bowl,
Swaying it gently with her mother hand.
She touches all things alike, binding time
Into a spell of peaceful, dreamless sleep,
Deep as the cradle of her ample breast,
Under the sunset's little golden cloud
Dividing the dark earth from the land of rest.
I love to think of Death as she who swings
My cradle there across the western sweep;
Woman, who ever loves the sunset sky
Would choose this place to put her child to sleep.

Think of the sunsets that will sweep above—
Think of the ages rolling on and on;
Think of Eternity whose watchful care
Broods o'er the entity of last sweet calm.
Worlds may crumble with the last soul's breath,
Still will the cradle sweep the deep abyss,
For there is nought that lasts as long as Death.

Kiss me, Sweet Death, and trundle me away
Under the sunset glow out in the west.

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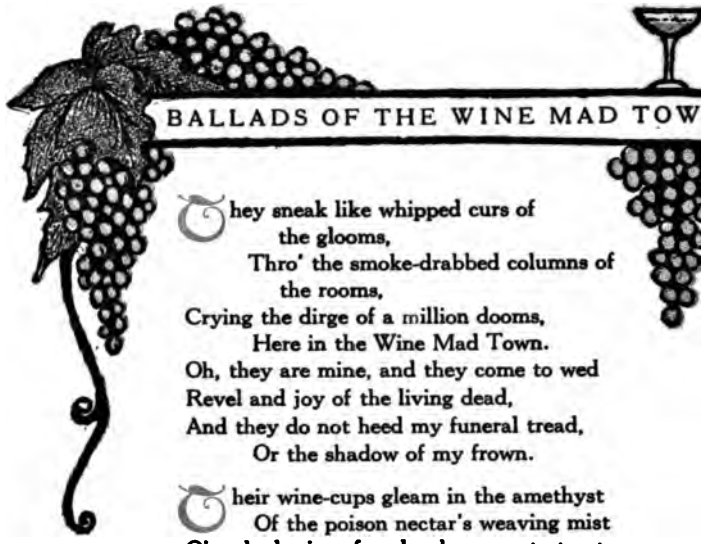
The Demon Strangler

THE STRANGLER'S SONG

Behold me! the demon strangler, I
Stalk my prey with a falconer's eye,
And check them off as they fall and die,
Here in the Wine Mad Town.
'T is a harvest thick with bodies sown;
'Neath a weight of sin they reek and moan;
They shake the ghost with an aspen groan,
Here in the Wine Mad Town.

I call my women in one by one,
I give no grace, and I spare them, none,
And I choke them till they 're dead and done,
Then fling them rudely down.
Their big eyes start from their sockets deep;
I clutch their throats till they go to sleep,
And I pile them in a smothery heap,
Here in the Wine Mad Town.

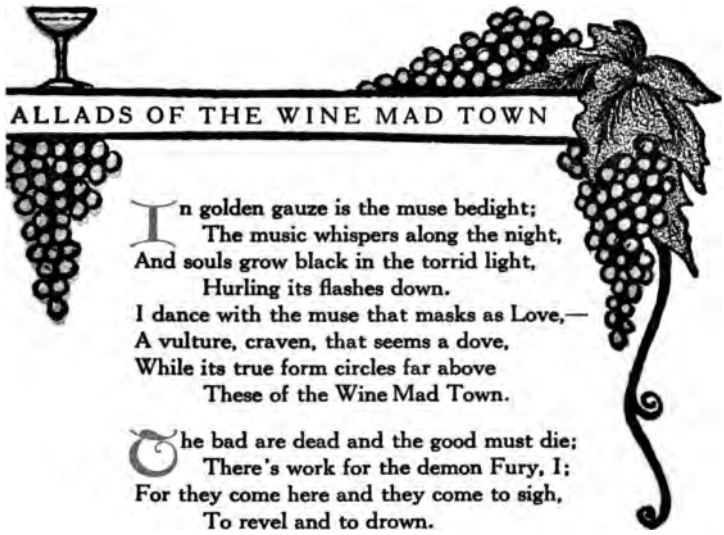
I tread my way where the torches burn,
And the incense trails from urn to urn,
And harpers chant and reed flutes yearn,—
Calling my curses down.
They echo back from the desert's sweep—
The wild night things that cannot sleep,—
While the low-voiced winds that whine and weep,
Whisper their hate around.



They sneak like whipped curs of
the glooms,
Thro' the smoke-drabbed columns of
the rooms,
Crying the dirge of a million dooms,
Here in the Wine Mad Town.
Oh, they are mine, and they come to wed
Revel and joy of the living dead,
And they do not heed my funeral tread,
Or the shadow of my frown.

Their wine-cups gleam in the amethyst
Of the poison nectar's weaving mist
O'er the brains of souls who come to tryst,
To riot and to drown.
The lures are hung with a million stars;
Jeweled and carved are the amber bars;
And beneath it all the stain and scars,
Here in the Wine Mad Town.

They rob the ponds of the iris fair
And chaplets make for their spicy hair;
They corrupt the blooms to weave the snare
Their sinfulness to crown.
On the lustful breast a crocus blows,
On the heart of hate a rare wild-rose,
And a wanton brow the laurel shows,
Mocking their fair renown.

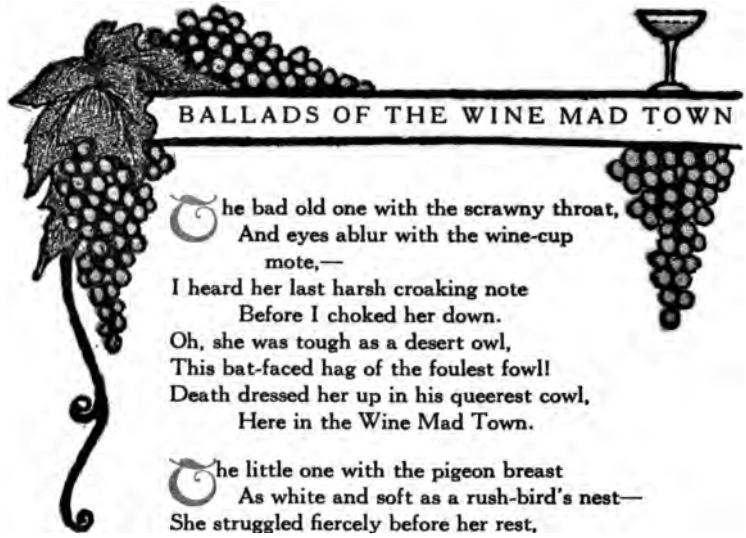


BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

In golden gauze is the muse bedight;
The music whispers along the night,
And souls grow black in the torrid light,
Hurling its flashes down.
I dance with the muse that masks as Love,—
A vulture, craven, that seems a dove,
While its true form circles far above
These of the Wine Mad Town.

The bad are dead and the good must die;
There's work for the demon Fury, I;
For they come here and they come to sigh,
To revel and to drown.
I follow fast on their morbid tread;
I see their souls and their bodies sped;
I clutch their throats until they're dead,
Here in the Wine Mad Town.

I caught the one with the night-hawk stare,
Seized her quick by the gem-decked hair;
Dogs! but her lover thought her fair—
He but a puppet clown.
I caught her throat where the veins stood blue;
Then slowly changed to a purple hue,
And I saw her wretched life slip through,
Here in the Wine Mad Town.

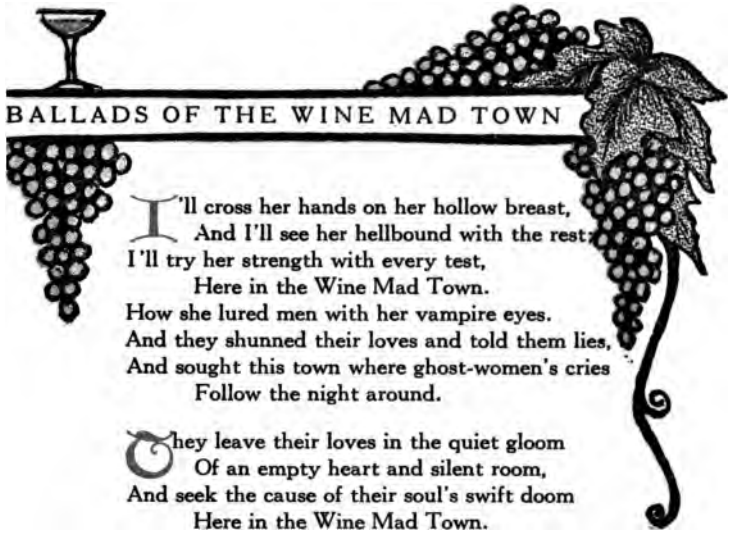


BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

The bad old one with the scrawny throat,
And eyes ablur with the wine-cup mote,—
I heard her last harsh croaking note
Before I choked her down.
Oh, she was tough as a desert owl,
This bat-faced hag of the foulest fowl!
Death dressed her up in his queerest cowl,
Here in the Wine Mad Town.

The little one with the pigeon breast
As white and soft as a rush-bird's nest—
She struggled fiercely before her rest,
Snapping her eyes of brown.
But she was cute when at last she broke,
Limp as vapor from the incense smoke,
A poor young thing for the hell-blast stoke;
Here in the Wine Mad Town.

But there was one whom I could not croak
With a brazen circle 'round her throat;
I tried her thrice, and my talons broke,
Trying to choke her down.
She gave me stares from her sea-green eyes
Deep as the Nile where the channel lies,
Wide as the sea where the white spume flies
And whining sailors drown.

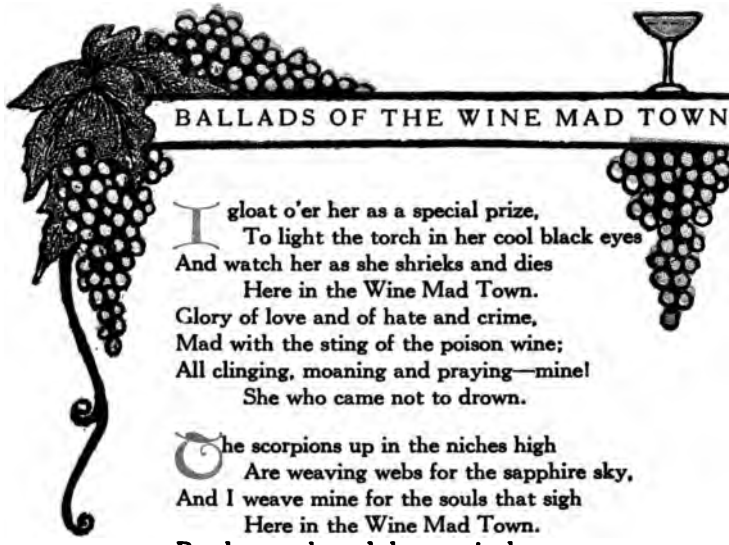


BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

I'll cross her hands on her hollow breast,
And I'll see her hellbound with the rest;
I'll try her strength with every test,
Here in the Wine Mad Town.
How she lured men with her vampire eyes.
And they shunned their loves and told them lies,
And sought this town where ghost-women's cries
Follow the night around.

They leave their loves in the quiet gloom
Of an empty heart and silent room,
And seek the cause of their soul's swift doom
Here in the Wine Mad Town.
And they who seek for their erring there,
Knowing them not in the false light's glare,—
They shudder back from the brazen stare
Of those of the jeweled gown.

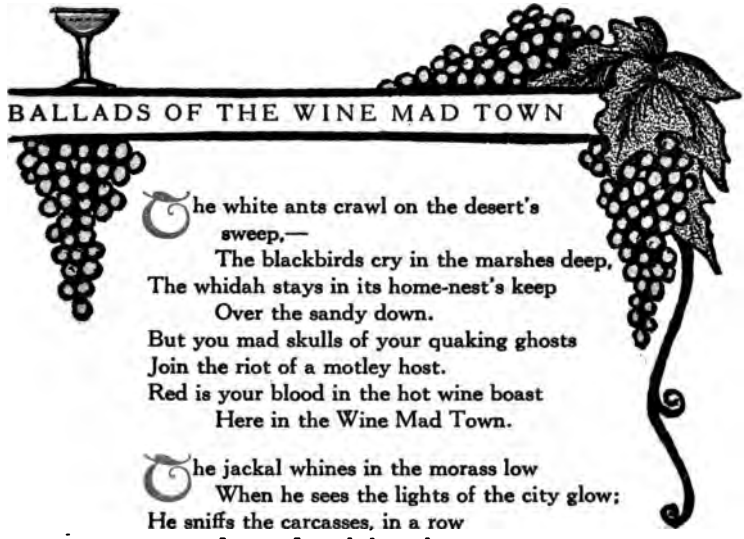
And there was one on the primrose way
Who wanted to dance and would not pay,
But I lured her in my own sure way,
Here in the Wine Mad Town.
Ah, there was flame when her passion woke,
Fanned to white by a master stroke,
As weird and wild as the storms evoke,
Hurling their torrents down.



I gloat o'er her as a special prize,
To light the torch in her cool black eyes
And watch her as she shrieks and dies
Here in the Wine Mad Town.
Glory of love and of hate and crime,
Mad with the sting of the poison wine;
All clinging, moaning and praying—mine!
She who came not to drown.

The scorpions up in the niches high
Are weaving webs for the sapphire sky,
And I weave mine for the souls that sigh
Here in the Wine Mad Town.
Powdery moths and the vampire bat,
The crevice wasps and the scarabs fat,
Lizards green and the mummy rat
Scratch and scurry around.

The lichen feeds on the locust dust
And spreads its moss like a copper rust,
And the insects crawl upon its crust
Of olive and gray and brown.
The granites crumble beneath the sun.
And the wind and rain their part have done;
But your true fates you have sought to shun,
You of the Wine Mad Town.

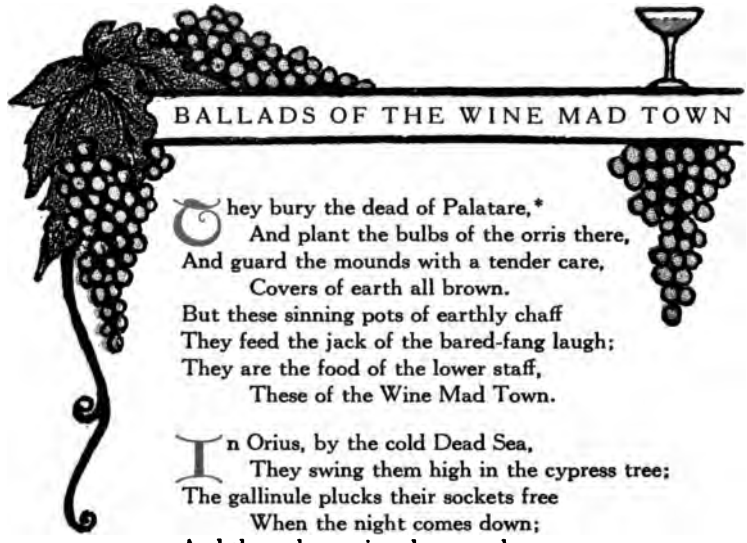


BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

The white ants crawl on the desert's
sweep,—
The blackbirds cry in the marshes deep,
The whidah stays in its home-nest's keep
Over the sandy down.
But you mad skulls of your quaking ghosts
Join the riot of a motley host.
Red is your blood in the hot wine boast
Here in the Wine Mad Town.

The jackal whines in the morass low
When he sees the lights of the city glow;
He sniffs the carcasses, in a row
Just as I send them down.
He is a drab and a sorry beast,
A morbid guest at a morbid feast,
And he gets them all, the great and least,
Here in the Wine Mad Town.

They burn the bodies of the city Ghott,*
But these mad women are left to rot,
And buzzards wheeling over the spot
Show where I flung them down.
They tomb the bodies of the city Orr*
Whose spirits flit to the Isis shore;
But these, corrupt to the inner core,
Rot in the Wine Mad Town.



BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

They bury the dead of Palatare,*
And plant the bulbs of the orris there,
And guard the mounds with a tender care,
Covers of earth all brown.
But these sinning pots of earthly chaff
They feed the jack of the bared-fang laugh;
They are the food of the lower staff,
These of the Wine Mad Town.

In Orius, by the cold Dead Sea,
They swing them high in the cypress tree;
The gallinule plucks their sockets free
When the night comes down;
And there they swing them one by one,
Osiris dried by his scorching sun,
A mummy husk when his work is done,
These of the Sun God Town.

But these poor pulps of the wine-brew band,
They strew them out on the desert land;
Their ghosts at night creep over the sand,
Dragging their bones around.
And still they come to my awful grasp;
Shriek and shudder with an aspen gasp,—
They of the eyes in the laughing mask
Here in the Wine Mad Town.

TO BE
PUBLIC
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS



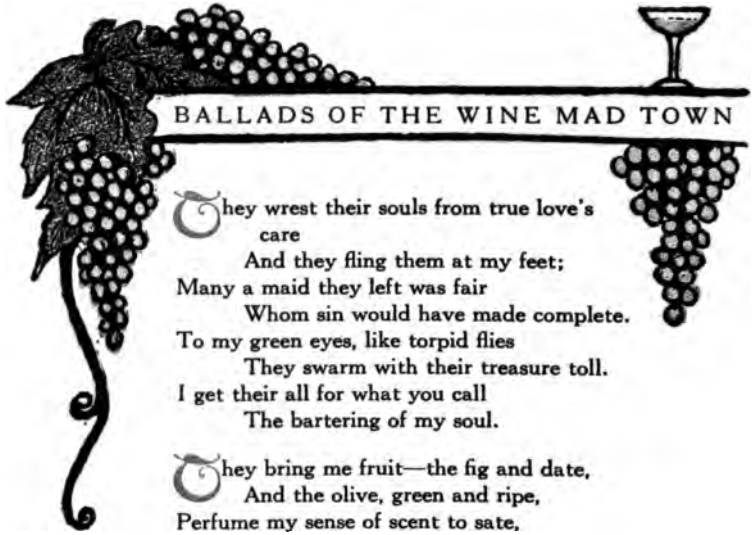
Jezebel

SONG OF JEZEBEL

They brought me gold from Kariaan*
And they brought me jade from Rhei,*
Silks from the looms of Orien*
And wools from the Galilee;
And jewels rare from Palataire*
That were seized from dead men's arms;
I pay the price, a goodly thrice,
With my subtile, wanton charms.

I pay with songs that thrill and sate,
And I dance with limbs quite bare;
The art of shame will fix the rate
Of the price within the snare.
My anklets chime in silvery rhyme,
My arms are a jeweled crust;
A scarlet veil of mesh so frail
Reveals my unsouled dust.

They do not see the dearth of soul,
For they only want my clay
Like jackals in their hunger-rôle,—
So I make them doubly pay.
The jackal rends, but hunger sends
The feast to his yearning maw,
But man's flesh-call is the selfish all
Of a strong and lustful law.

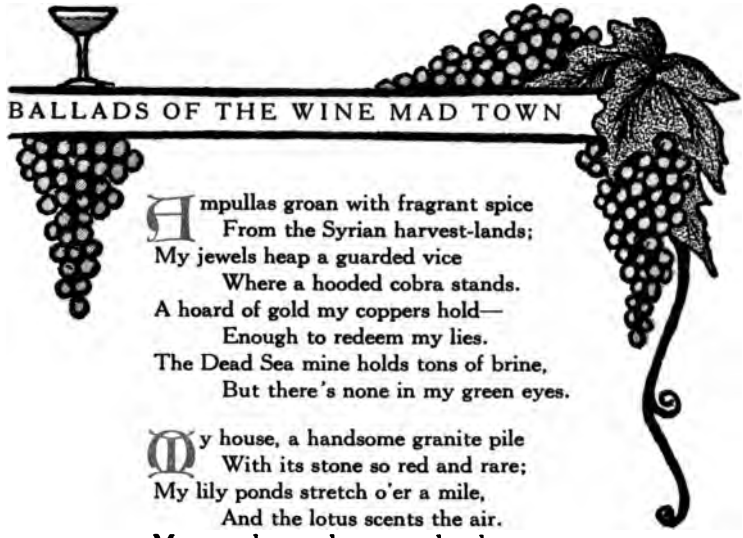


BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

They wrest their souls from true love's
care
And they fling them at my feet;
Many a maid they left was fair
Whom sin would have made complete.
To my green eyes, like torpid flies
They swarm with their treasure toll.
I get their all for what you call
The bartering of my soul.

They bring me fruit—the fig and date,
And the olive, green and ripe,
Perfume my sense of scent to sate,
And weed for the long-stemmed pipe.
To see me drink, a fish would shrink
In shame at his poor weak thirst.
I've drunk their wines 'til many times
I felt I'd surely burst.

With cawpaw* silk my bed is made
With the skillful art of Phorr;
I'm so rich I could buy the jade
Of the temple by the shore
Of Galilee, the sacred sea,
And all of their gauds and urns—
The altar rug and ugly mug
Where the kidah* taper burns.



BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

Amphullas groan with fragrant spice
From the Syrian harvest-lands;
My jewels heap a guarded vice
Where a hooded cobra stands.
A hoard of gold my coppers hold—
Enough to redeem my lies.
The Dead Sea mine holds tons of brine,
But there's none in my green eyes.

My house, a handsome granite pile
With its stone so red and rare;
My lily ponds stretch o'er a mile,
And the lotus scents the air.
My eunuchs stand on every hand,
My maids are a score or more.
Bronze tigers wait in royal state
By the pillars of my door.

I bought these gifts and paid the price
With a legacy of sin.
I'll hand it down through years of vice
'Til I and my time grow dim.
Tears there be in the unnamed sea
That waits where the Nile flows down.
My dry-eyed ghost is man's vile toast
Of shame in the Wine Mad Town.



Dead Women's Ghosts

DEAD WOMEN'S GHOSTS

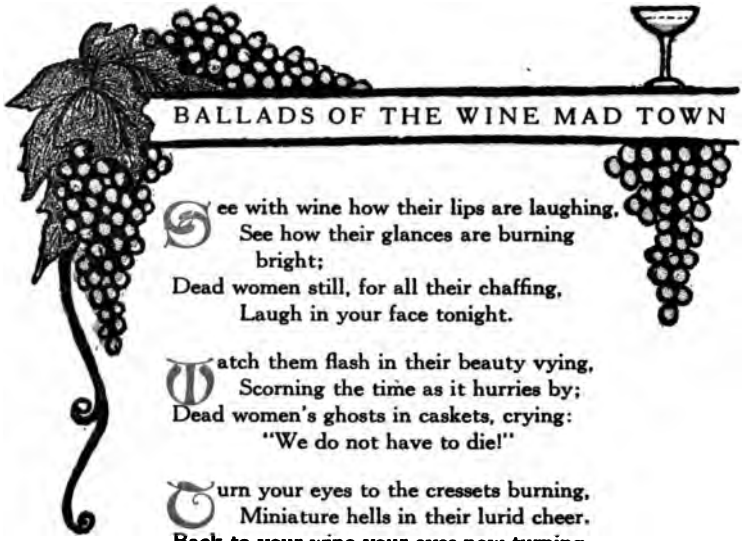
Ghost hands on the casements are drumming,
Shadows are scurrying swiftly past,
Dead women to the town are coming,
Crowding in thick and fast.

Blanched their faces, stonily staring,
Fleeing in from the shadowy shore,
See them lurch in their frantic faring,
In at the lighted door.

Dead women all, in living carnals,
Pleading the light for their laughing sin;
They will be welcome to these charnels,
Yawning to let them in.

Curdled blood in their veins by seeing
Out of their cups all their sins stripped bare;
Throwing their wasted baleful being
Out on the sullen glare.

Buy them wine for their lorn hearts warming,
Give them release from the morbid strain.
They will be here still in the morning,
Earning their sinful gain.



BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

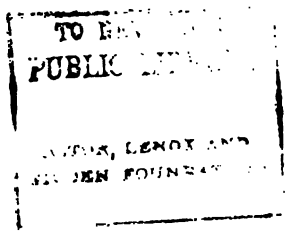
See with wine how their lips are laughing.
See how their glances are burning bright;
Dead women still, for all their chaffing,
Laugh in your face tonight.

Watch them flash in their beauty vying,
Scorning the time as it hurries by;
Dead women's ghosts in caskets, crying:
"We do not have to die!"

Turn your eyes to the cressets burning,
Miniature hells in their lurid cheer.
Back to your wine your eyes now turning,—
I tell you Hell is here!

Women, I say your lips are lying!
Death you explore by your living blight;
And still you fear the doom of dying,
Who die here every night.

Buy them wine for their forlorn cheering,
Doomed ghosts of women filing by,
Laughing, moaning, cursing and fearing,
Who still have got to die.


PUBLIC



Bring Your Imps to Stir My Gin

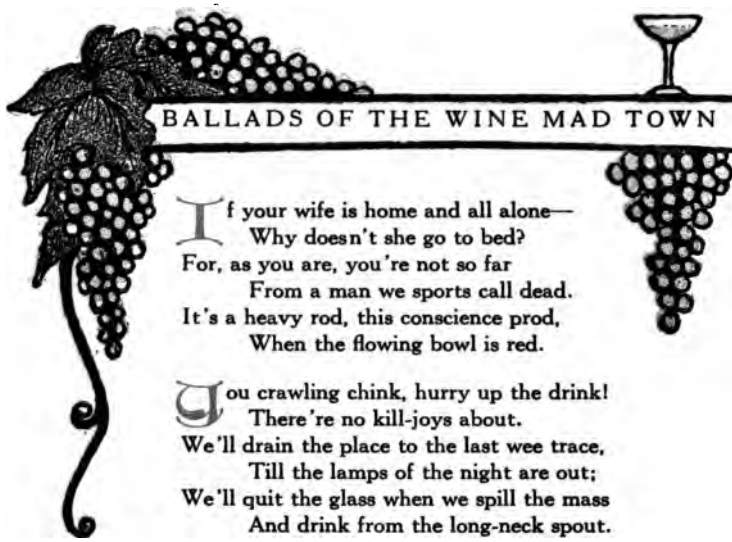
THE DRUNKARD'S SONG

My sin-soaked soul plays a stellar rôle
In the drab land of regret;
I play my part from a sodden heart
With the wailing trigger set.
And my money's worth of Hell on earth
Is more than an even bet.

When the game was young, full strong I sung,
"Bring your imps to stir my gin!"
On Satan's spear hang the foolish tear
And smother my care in sin,
Open the gate to the tides of fate
And call all the drunkards in!

You silk-shod chink, hurry up the drink
For the crowd that's gathered here!
Each is a sport of the spirit sort—
No thirst for the lowly beer!
Bring in the "cham" the price be-damn!
And see that it's good and clear.

The onyx bar is a sesame star;
And now I can count my friends.
Their shyness shrinks in a flood of drinks,
And class with scruple ends.
Good-fellowship is in every sip
And song for the pals, it sends.



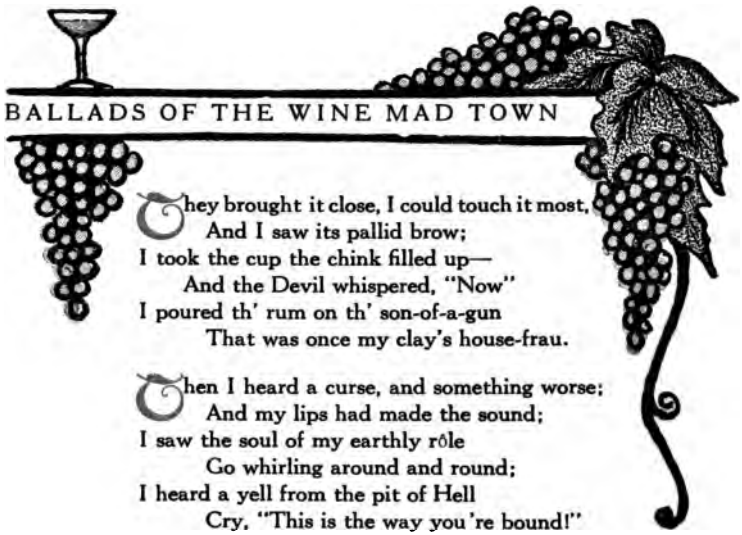
BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

If your wife is home and all alone—
Why doesn't she go to bed?
For, as you are, you're not so far
From a man we sports call dead.
It's a heavy rod, this conscience prod,
When the flowing bowl is red.

You crawling chink, hurry up the drink!
There're no kill-joys about.
We'll drain the place to the last wee trace,
Till the lamps of the night are out;
We'll quit the glass when we spill the mass
And drink from the long-neck spout.

For a while it seemed like a dream of dreams
Or a bright epitome;
But the primrose path had an aftermath
All lying in wait for me,
And I played the mime to the tangled rime
Of a wine mad comedy.

As the game got fast o'er the bubbled glass—
Did I see my soul pass by?
It looked so queer on its lowly bier
That my maudlin lips must cry,
"You heathen chink fetch another drink!
My gullet is going dry!"

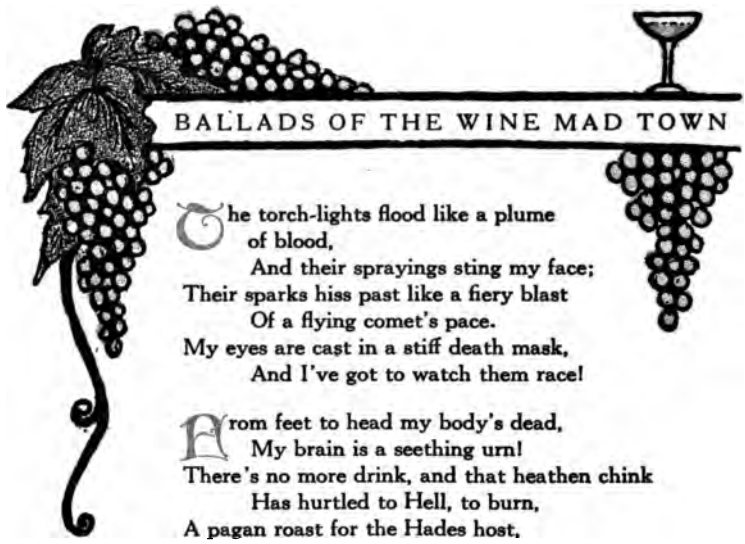


They brought it close, I could touch it most,
And I saw its pallid brow;
I took the cup the chink filled up—
And the Devil whispered, "Now"
I poured th' rum on th' son-of-a-gun
That was once my clay's house-frau.

Then I heard a curse, and something worse;
And my lips had made the sound;
I saw the soul of my earthly rôle
Go whirling around and round;
I heard a yell from the pit of Hell
Cry, "This is the way you're bound!"

You teak-eyed chink, fetch another drink
And make it a million strong!
You bold-faced Tess, in your waistless dress,
Sing your fiercest, lushest song!
Your lewd song trips on your tippled lips,
And your tune is going wrong.

Your once white throat is a purple bloat
With a million serpents wound;
Your eyes are strung on your forked tongue
And they make a hissing sound;
Your hair's jet cloud is a death-head's shroud
With the chains of Dante bound.



BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

The torch-lights flood like a plume
of blood,
And their sprayings sting my face;
Their sparks hiss past like a fiery blast
Of a flying comet's pace.
My eyes are cast in a stiff death mask,
And I've got to watch them race!

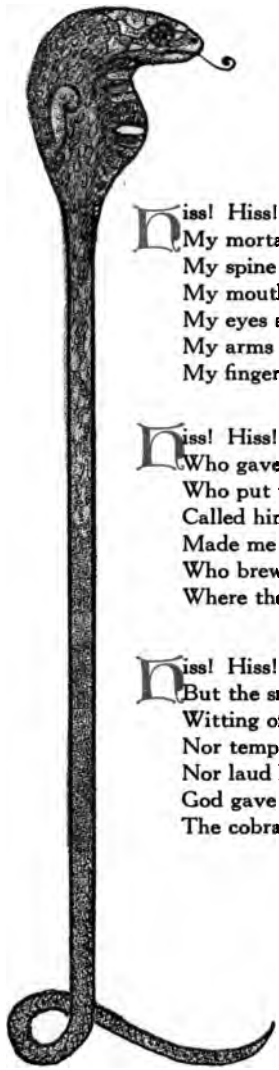
From feet to head my body's dead,
My brain is a seething urn!
There's no more drink, and that heathen chink
Has hurtled to Hell, to burn,
A pagan roast for the Hades host,
And done to a juicy turn.

My soul's disgrace with its sooty face
Is going to have a slice
When they carve that chink of Satan's sink
And season him up with spice;
They'll do it too well to ever tell
That we fed him up on rice.

If my soul has fled, why is my head
Demanding my dust's suspense?
Is this rank joke on the incense smoke,
Or charged to my own expense?
They're pouring sizz in my mortal phyz
As a humane recompense.

They sober me up on the soda cup
And make me settle the bill;
They stack it high and the only why
Is a hogshead full of swill;
They charge me up for the last wee sup,
And thrice for the stuff I spill.

They charge again for the poison-bane
That the coryphees lap up,
For the virtue stains on these lovely Janes
And stains on the cheering cup.
I started this thing, a golden king,
And now I'm a drunken pup!

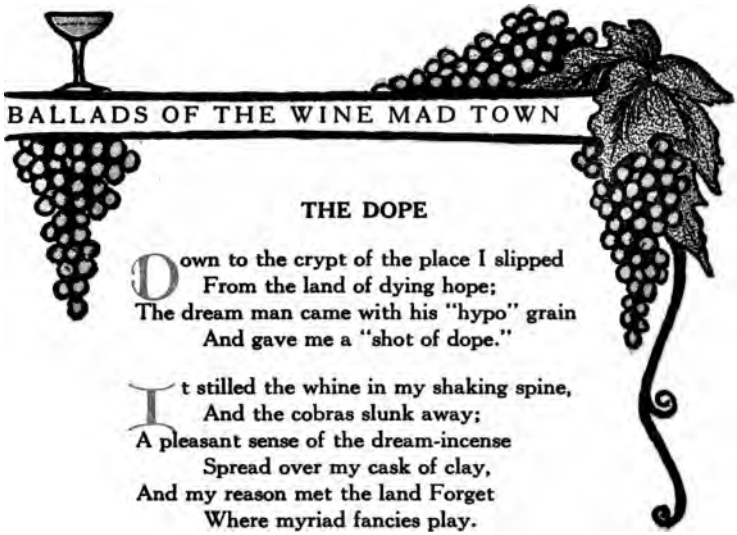


HAJE INCARNATE

Hiss! Hiss!
My mortal house is a cask of clay,
My spine is a tree where cobras play,
My mouth a pool where these serpents drink,
My eyes a cave where their green eyes blink,
My arms are ropes of their creeping scales,
My finger-ends are their clashing tails.
Hiss! H

Hiss! Hiss!
Who gave my carcass its title, Man?
Who put the serpent beyond the ban—
Called him a snake for his belly-crawl,
Made me his master, the king of all?
Who brewed the drink for the change of scene
Where the snake in man may rule supreme.
Hiss! H

Hiss! Hiss!
But the snake is sane and will not drink
Witting of hurt at the poisoned brink,
Nor tempt the fires to light his brain,
Nor laud his skill in the poison-bane.
God gave a soul to my house of clay—
The cobras frightened its ghost away.
Hiss! H

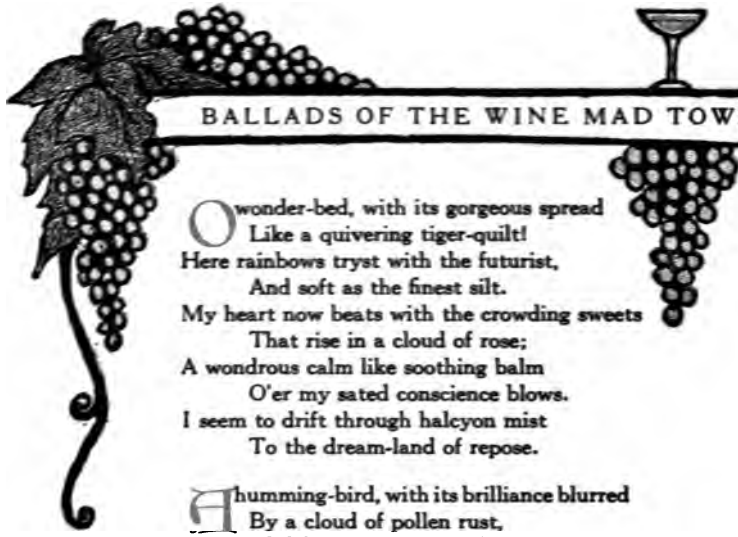


THE DOPE

Down to the crypt of the place I slipped
From the land of dying hope;
The dream man came with his "hypo" grain
And gave me a "shot of dope."

It stilled the whine in my shaking spine,
And the cobras slunk away;
A pleasant sense of the dream-incense
Spread over my cask of clay,
And my reason met the land Forget
Where myriad fancies play.

Then the poppies spread a crimson bed
In a vale where the dream-wind blows;
A velvet bee sang a song to me
From the rim of a damask rose;
The butterflies, with their agate eyes,
Spread a cover o'er my couch;
They brought a cup that the bee filled up
With the honey from his pouch;
It flowed in drips from his nectared lips,
From under his velvet blouse.



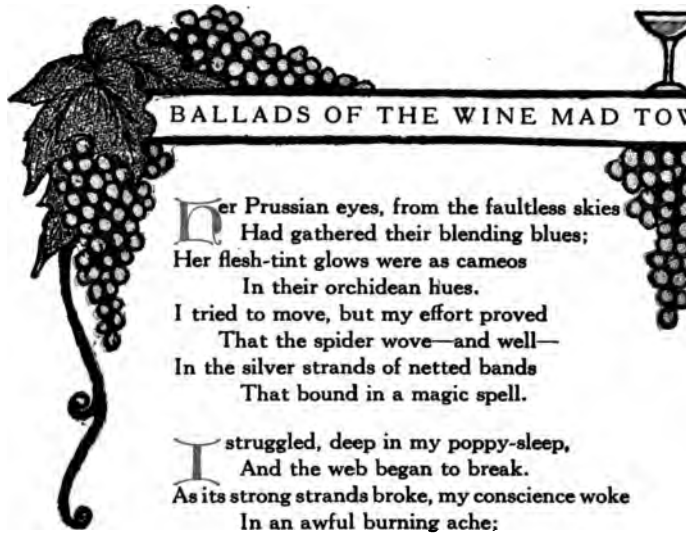
O wonder-bed, with its gorgeous spread
Like a quivering tiger-quilt!
Here rainbows tryst with the futurist,
And soft as the finest silt.
My heart now beats with the crowding sweets
That rise in a cloud of rose;
A wondrous calm like soothing balm
O'er my sated conscience blows.
I seem to drift through halcyon mist
To the dream-land of repose.

A humming-bird, with its brilliance blurred
By a cloud of pollen rust,
In poised delight held the gold sunlight
On his wings of diamond-dust.
A spider came with his weaver train,
And a silver web he spun;
'Twas an orchid veil so fine and frail
That it melted in the sun.

They spread a sheath of mullen leaf
And shut the sunlight out.
The web returned, and its meshes burned
With jewels all hung about.
The perfume brew of the pearly dew
Berimmed it around with white.
The breeze now sings through its harp-like strings
In a burst of pure delight.

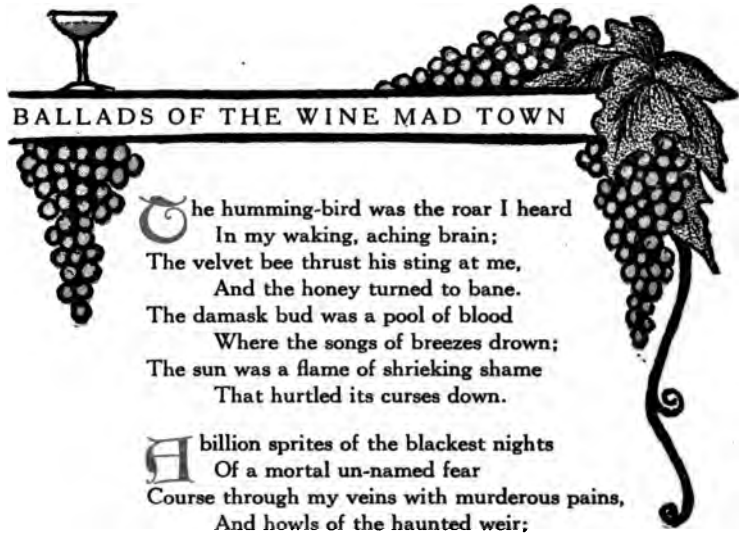
From a lily-bloom white as the moon,
An elf of a nomad trips;
She caught a shroud from a chiffon cloud—
And she kissed my swooning lips;
Like a downy fleck she brushed my neck
With her soft round velvet arms;
For a breathless pause the chiffon gauze
Revealed her thousand charms!

173977A



Her Prussian eyes, from the faultless skies
Had gathered their blending blues;
Her flesh-tint glows were as cameos
In their orchidean hues.
I tried to move, but my effort proved
That the spider wove—and well—
In the silver strands of netted bands
That bound in a magic spell.

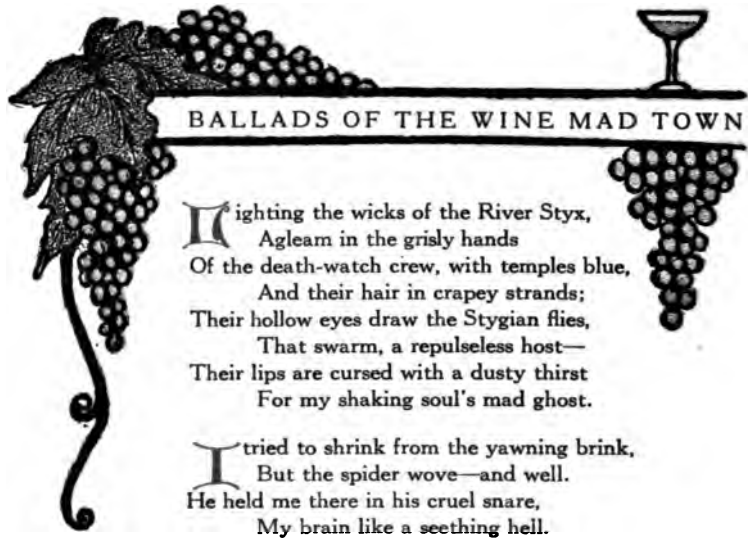
I struggled, deep in my poppy-sleep,
And the web began to break.
As its strong strands broke, my conscience woke
In an awful burning ache:
The nomad fled, and the poppy-bed
Held a million tongues of flame;
The butterflies were a mass of dyes
Like a lurid wrap of shame.



BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

The humming-bird was the roar I heard
In my waking, aching brain;
The velvet bee thrust his sting at me,
And the honey turned to bane.
The damask bud was a pool of blood
Where the songs of breezes drown;
The sun was a flame of shrieking shame
That hurtled its curses down.

A billion sprites of the blackest nights
Of a mortal un-named fear
Course through my veins with murderous pains,
And howls of the haunted weir;
The cobras climb through my fleshless spine,
Which quakes like a blanched dead tree;
And Death creeps past in a sable mask,
With his finger trained on me.



BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

Lighting the wicks of the River Styx,
Agleam in the grisly hands
Of the death-watch crew, with temples blue,
And their hair in crapey strands;
Their hollow eyes draw the Stygian flies,
That swarm, a repulseless host—
Their lips are cursed with a dusty thirst
For my shaking soul's mad ghost.

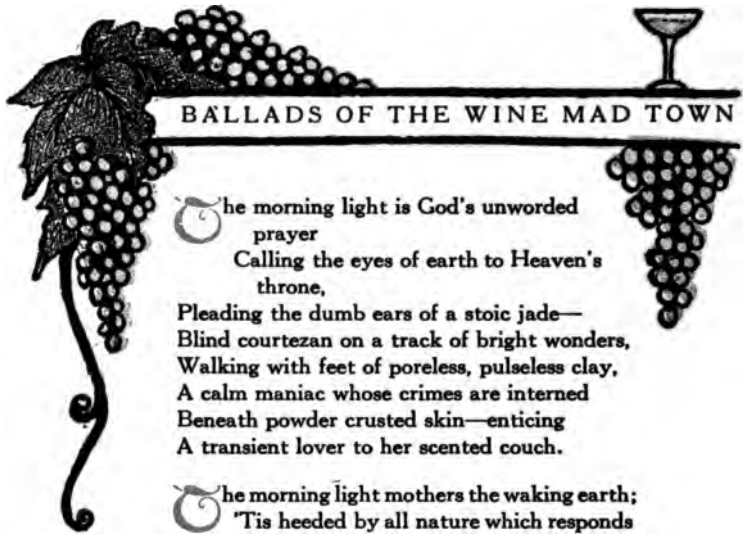
I tried to shrink from the yawning brink,
But the spider wove—and well.
He held me there in his cruel snare,
My brain like a seething hell.
I saw the dead of a trillion sped
By the route of rum and "dope;"
I shrieked, "O God!" from my ruined sod,
In a last wild frantic hope.

MORNING

The morning light may not redeem their
grace,
Though it illumes the cosmic universe;
Calling the lark to song and wakes the lake
To many fine degrees of blending light.
An artist and a genius in accord,
Flaying the dew-damp and the cryptic moth,
Blasting the fungi of the tragic night,
Tearing the traitor's mask from hidden sin.

The morning light may not the dead revive,
For flesh is souled apart from its domain.
Flesh is a serf to mind, a magnet point
Drawing its doom from the superior gift
Of a kingdom above dumb nature's ken;
Mind builds high and by that same sure power
Plunders the abyss of infamy's bowl—
Those mad craters of rampant appetite.

The morning light may not the soul evoke
That took the way along the midnight trail.
Took its own heart from out the living breast,
Flung it away and bared a yawning cave
Into which stole the dread of morning light,
Of sanity and mind, fleeing the day—
A moron, slave to wine's oblivion,
Hating the lighted hours of consciousness.

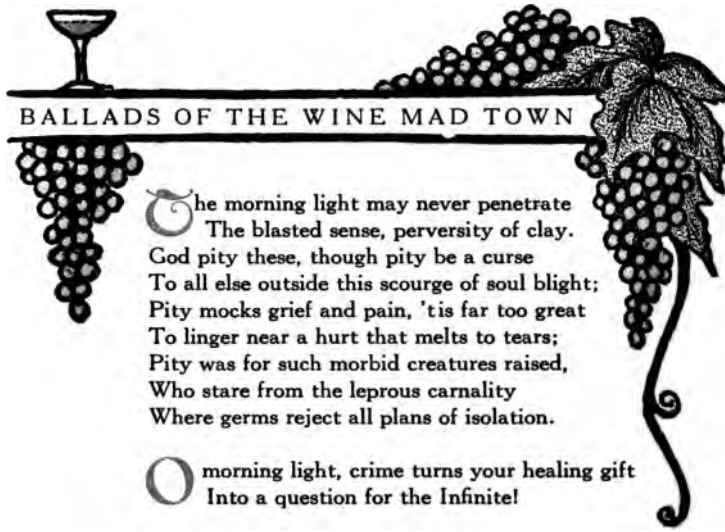


BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

The morning light is God's unworded prayer
Calling the eyes of earth to Heaven's throne,
Pleading the dumb ears of a stoic jade—
Blind courtezan on a track of bright wonders,
Walking with feet of poreless, pulseless clay,
A calm maniac whose crimes are interned
Beneath powder crusted skin—enticing
A transient lover to her scented couch.

The morning light mothers the waking earth;
'Tis heeded by all nature which responds
In diverse ways, an universal call.
Even the leopard cat, with cruel paws,
Stretches his length along the jutting craig,
Feeling at peace beneath the morning glow.
Swarming amphebia with counted cells
Rise from the swamps as natural worshipers.

The morning light unhoods the sleeping rose,
The grass blade curves to the eastern torch's flare
A tiny worm creeps from beneath a leaf,
A blind mole comes up out of the cold earth.
Day is consciousness to all normal life;
Yet the night reveler seeks a darksome niche
And hides in fear of such great happiness.



BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

The morning light may never penetrate
The blasted sense, perversity of clay.
God pity these, though pity be a curse
To all else outside this scourge of soul blight;
Pity mocks grief and pain, 'tis far too great
To linger near a hurt that melts to tears;
Pity was for such morbid creatures raised,
Who stare from the leprous carnality
Where germs reject all plans of isolation.

O morning light, crime turns your healing gift
Into a question for the Infinite!

SISTER MARGARET MARY AND THE FALLEN STAR

Ah, you have come, dear Sister! I knew
you would heed my call.
It's strange how we fallen women turn to
you, after all.
I fear it's late for pardon, at the close of my
last day,
And yet if you'll teach me, Sister, I'll try to
learn to pray.

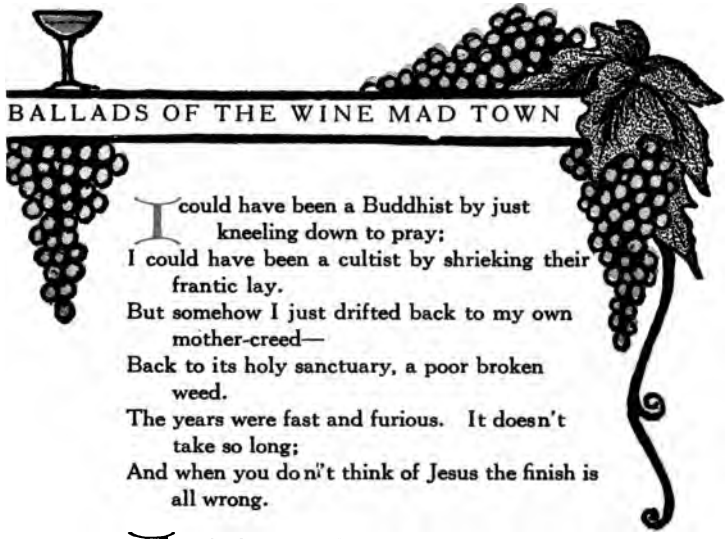
Perhaps you think I've been wicked, I haven't
been just right.
"The life" seemed just to cling to me—
I wasn't made to fight;
I was all right in the beginning, and then
they brought the wine;
Then it was the lights and singing and jewels—
all were mine!
It seemed all right I liked to watch and laugh
and sing the songs.
It wasn't until I got sick that I could see
the wrongs.

Even then I couldn't quit—it wasn't
wine any more;
It was something stronger, eating there at my
heart's deep core,
I loved him—and he was so young and so
recklessly gay,
I'd have gone anywhere with him—I couldn't
break away.
He couldn't think of living quiet; so I hid
my pain;
I just kept getting sicker, and knew that the
fight was vain.

But still I danced and laughed, and he
called me his "Little Star."
He took me away to travel o'er land and
water far
Into foreign countries, and still it was laughter
and wine;
And now I seemed to need it—it fastened its
life to mine.
I had to have it then, Sister—I needed
comfort so.
only lived in its drugging, its warming
after-glow.

I wanted to be married, have children
and settle down,
But when I told him of my wish he met it
with a frown;
And then I just seemed to wither; I could n't
longer play.
For a while he tried to stand it, and then—he
went away!
Some one brought me a doctor, but I was as
good as dead;
And once when he thought me sleeping, "It's
the white plague," he said.

And then I moved up here, Sister; the
funds were shrinking low,
Yet I had enough to last me the distance I
must go.
There, on your great white altars—just how
do they weigh my sin?
Perhaps I wasn't so awful bad—I was true to
him.
Maybe I should have a priest. My mother was
of your faith.
I remember my baptism; it seems like some
dim wraith.



BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

I could have been a Buddhist by just
kneeling down to pray;
I could have been a cultist by shrieking their
frantic lay.
But somehow I just drifted back to my own
mother-creed—
Back to its holy sanctuary, a poor broken
weed.
The years were fast and furious. It doesn't
take so long;
And when you don't think of Jesus the finish is
all wrong.

Just look at me, dear Sister! How old do
I seem to be?
You say I look past forty? I am only
thirty-three.
There's a woman in the room above; she's
what I have been,
Only—well it is different—she plays with so
many men.
Yes, I was always true to him. Fate gives
the same reply.
Will you call her down, dear Sister, and let her
watch me die!

It might bring her to reason if she saw
my sorry plight,
And it might save her from drowning in
song and drink and light.
You say she is too young and hard and wouldn't
even care?
Yes, I know you speak the truth—her skies are
all clear and fair.
And yet as I hear her walking above me to
and fro,
I seem to feel 't would help her. O Sister, it
may be so!

I am growing so tired! The world is all
hushed and still.
I 'll tell you why I sent for you, what gave
me strength of will:
I 've heard the church chimes ringing, and it
seemed that day by day
The yearning just kept growing in me for to
learn to pray.
I seem to be so feeble! My moments on earth
are few.
Sister, if you will show me how, I 'll say a prayer
with you.

Help me clasp my fingers. Oh, they are
numb and very chill!
I can no longer see you, yet am conscious of
your will.
Give me the words, dear Sister, just say them
ahead of me—
The nun: "She is dead. O blessed Christ, re-
ceive her!—Ave Mary—"

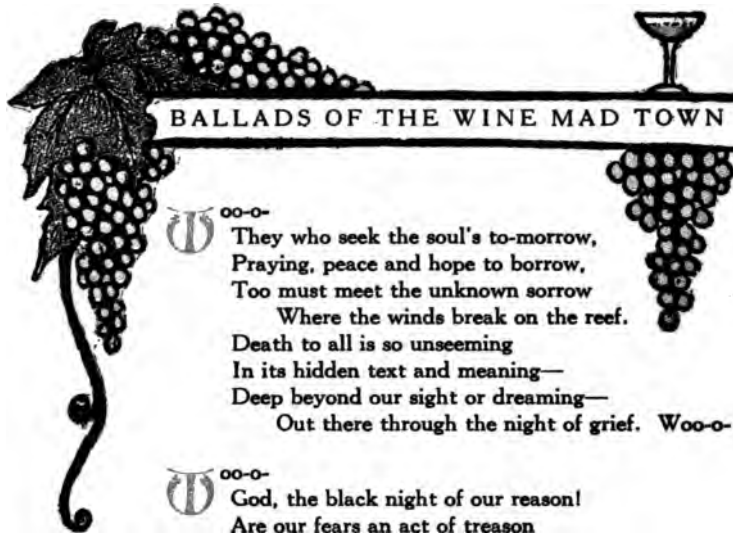


Fear

NEARING THE BAR

Woo-o-
'Tis the sad night wind a-moaning
Through the gray veil of the gloaming
Where the lost sin-souls are roaming
Through the bleak wild night afar.
Do they warn me in their sighing—
Smothered coronach of crying—
Through the misery of the dying—
Out there just beyond the bar! Woo-o-

Woo-o-
Out there just beyond the hour,
Shorn of breath and earthly power
Where the unshrived soul must cower
In the terrible suspense
Of the dread, the awful seeming—
The perhaps of its real meaning—
Sought in science, faith and dreaming,
Ere the soul has hurtled hence. Woo-o-



BALLADS OF THE WINE MAD TOWN

Oo-o-
They who seek the soul's to-morrow,
Praying, peace and hope to borrow,
Too must meet the unknown sorrow
Where the winds break on the reef.
Death to all is so unseeming
In its hidden text and meaning—
Deep beyond our sight or dreaming—
Out there through the night of grief. Woo-o-

Oo-o-
God, the black night of our reason!
Are our fears an act of treason
To some endless star-strewn season
Just beyond the pause of breath?
How we fear the vast forever,
When the dust and soul must sever—
The be-nighted "why and whither"—
When we hear the call of Death! Woo-o-

HAGGARD NIGHT

Death

Deep, deep into my breast your talons sink,
O Black Bat, harbinger of death and dread!
Your eyes are set in night's solidified
Rivers of ink; the winds no longer whip,
Curdled and frozen in your mammoth shape.
You, of the oldest crypt in Egypt's depth,
Dragging your curse from centuries agone—
Where, in that dim abyss of blotted years
Found you this curse to feed the flesh upon?

Out of the crater, long the ash of flame—
Ash of the first fires of the thoughts of man;
Neither reptile, beast nor mortal art thou,
Smothery Black Bat creeping close to me,—
The last flesh thing my eyes may look upon;
Out of the tomb beyond the chronicles
Of Buddha worshipers, to science cold;
Over them each alike to spread a pall,
Over them all to spread the sodden mould.

O Black Bat, bring you now your dying train
Out of the bleakness of the crushing night!
Spread your smothering wings across my lips,
Drawing my breath beyond the limp pale clay.
Lepidoptera in its silent flight—
An endless army with its putty dust
Graying my vision, in the interval
Yawning twixt now and that dim land they named
Hell, and made it to be Universal!

Dusty moths, you flit before my eyes,
Brushing my face with mawkish pollen bane,
Blueing my lips, with song and wine now done;
Song, wine and lips are never to embrace
In the soft ecstasy of love again,
As e'er the call of Fate, invisible.
Fate drove them hence into the Black Bat's dust,
Dying within, long ere the flesh is dead.
The last weak quiver is the empty crust.

Maybe my soul returns to watch me die—
Seeing the hollow temples where the flesh
Has sunken like the earth that later on
Will sink when its wood house has broken in;
Will watch the curtain as the darkness falls—
Chanting some foreign-sounding useless prayer.
Compatible were soul and dust? Nay, nay!
Nature mismated them in mode, I think,
Something was wrong, for neither would obey.

The soul goes on adown the path before,
Chattel no more to sin and its demands—
Chattel no more to woe and dust's dumb mind
Within the ruined temple of its earth house.
The last sad office of this cold domain
Is to lift the latch at the door of Death;
Its crumbling knuckles thus implore release;
And as the soul departs its breath grows wan—
The maimed soul quivers out to seek for peace.

Where goes the soul along the Black Bat's trail
Through time's long night that never is to end?
Mayhap it be the sin-racked soul goes on
And on through meaningless and endless ways—
Stricken with blindness, mute and conscious to
No more sensations save the lonely ache
Of unnamed sorrow that forever gnaws;
Half smothering in a vague remembrance
Of flesh-chains turned to dust, Life's Trinity—
Body, breath and mind—gone down to nought;
The maimed sin-soul aches for eternity.

Or—

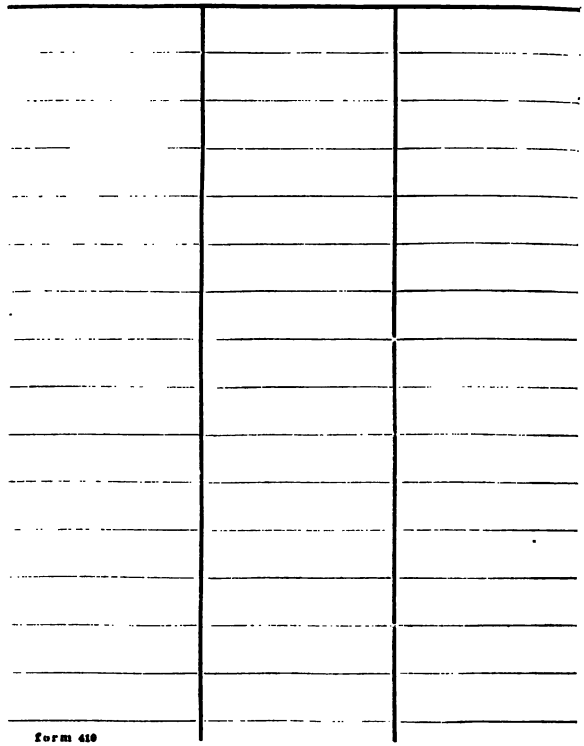
Rushing along through seas of smoke and flame,
Over the depthless craters of the void
Rimless space into the eternal blight
Beyond even its God's unconsciousness!

THE END



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